

From Chart House to Bush Hut

C. W. L. BRYDE



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The Dreary Monotony of Grey Sea and Greyer Sky.

From Chart House to Bush Hut

*Being the Record of a Sailor's
7 years in the Queensland Bush*

By
C. W. BRYDE



H. H. CHAMPION
Australasian Authors' Agency
Melbourne

DEDICATION.

*To those sturdy battlers, among whom I have
lived for seven years,
I doff my hat in respect;
and dedicate
My Book*

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PREFACE.

The idea in mind is to present, as far as possible, a true picture of life in the Scrub, as I had experienced it. With this end in view, I have neither glossed over the difficulties and disabilities, nor enlarged on the advantages, of selection life in the Scrublands. I have tried to make the book a fairly reliable and interesting guide to anyone thinking of tackling the life. With what success I leave the reader to determine.

THE AUTHOR.

“Up North.”

1642737

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From Chart House to Bush Hut

CHAPTER I

THE NEWCASTLE (N.S.W.)-CHILE COAL RUN.

THE trans-Pacific run is the most god-forsaken, monotonous trade in the world, I think. Our steamer was fairly fast for a tramp, and we were twenty-four days on the Eastbound trip and twenty-seven back to Newcastle—coal one way and ballast back. Not a solitary sail nor point of land to break the dreary monotony of grey sea and greyer sky, clear across to Valparaiso—5000 miles. Following the Great Circle track, you get down to 53 degrees or 54 degrees south latitude. In winter it's cold—blowing a gale pretty well all the time—and your ship's like a half-tide rock. In summer pretty much the same conditions prevail, with fog added. Occasionally there is a day when it's not blowing—then it rains. And there's ice to be looked out for at this time of the year, too, which is an added pleasantry.

Sweeping up on the Great Circle for Valparaiso, you close in gradually with the Chilean

coast, the first land sighted being usually the rocky highlands round Curramilla Point, the high sierras of the Andes being obscured by mist most times. Occasionally one gets a glimpse of noble Aconcagua, the mighty 26,000 ft. Andean giant. I shall never forget my first sight of it. It was about six p.m., and we were then about 260 miles from the mountain. The sun was setting. All at once there appeared on the starboard bow a huge irregular truncated cone in the heavens, enlarged by refraction to an incredible size. It was a deep rose red, and every crevasse, ledge and spur was pencilled with distinctness. Talk about awe-inspiring grandeur and beauty! Every man-jack in the ship turned out to gaze and gaze while it slowly faded; and then, suddenly, puff! like a candle blown out, it was gone.

On arriving at Valparaiso you moor to buoys, in about thirty fathoms of water. Instantly a horde of coaley pirates, who look (and smell) as if they never washed, swarms aboard and starts to cast adrift all your carefully prepared cargo gear, and alter it to suit themselves. You try and explain that "thisee ropee no boyno' ere," and are thereupon informed "Usted no sabe nada, pilote," or something like that, so you give way. Big lighters bump all the paint off alongside. Work goes on night and day, and in less than a week the coal is all out, and away you wallow to sea again. No chance of going ashore. Officers and engineers have to be here, there, and everywhere, for the lumpers pinch worse than—well! worse than the mate of a ship moored near a

Government dockyard, and *that's* saying something. They make a trade, too, out of bringing aboard bottles of the awful muck the lower class Chileño delights in, such as casash, potato caña, etc., one glass of which makes a man see snakes for a week. I really think some sailors would guzzle kerosene out of a whisky bottle. Anyhow, you're glad to get to sea for a rest.

Then the long dreary run of 7000 miles back "along the parallel" starts! nothing to see, nothing to break the awful monotony, till you strike the Australian coast again— Newcastle, for more coal.

You arrive on Wednesday night. "Sure of a Sunday this time!" you think. Vain hope! A boat comes alongside about 11 p.m. (Ship at anchor in the stream.)

"Ready for fumigation, mister?"

"Oh!—," you think, but don't say, for the officials can make things extremely unpleasant for you if they like. So its "Turn out, men, and get the stuff aboard." Five barrels of sulphur, and about four hundred little tin dishes to put it in. Ladle the sulphur in, each dish half-full, and pass it below. A lick of methylated spirits in each, a match, and the choking blue reek rises. On hatches! and batten well down; plug the ventilators—and then damn well go and camp on a stage slung over the bows, for nowhere else will you escape the caustic fumes. Sleep? I like to hear you! We've been getting cargo gear ready at sea this day, and we'll be all day to-morrow again, and no sleep this blessed night. Can you

wonder at the men going on the drunk? My personal sympathy is with them, but I daren't show it, or I'd lose my job, get no reference from the skipper likely, and be ruined.

We spend the night coughing, choking and cursing, and about 8 a.m. (Thursday) orders come to go alongside in the Basin. We go—and it's pandemonium let loose. The muffled roar of coal dropping in tons, clang of trimmers' shovels, hoarse shouts, stamping and crashings, with an occasional spasmodic clattering winch by way of variety.

All hands are on the beer ashore, and won't show up till Saturday at earliest. That leaves three officers and two apprentice boys to handle the ship, shift back and forth every half-hour or so, take stores aboard, put on 'tweendeck beams and hatches as required, and attend to the multifarious jobs connected with being in port. There isn't an earthly chance of going ashore further than the fruit shop over the way, especially for the mate, who has to be there all the time.

Finally the truth slowly comes home to you that you will be finished on Saturday night—8000 tons of cargo and bunkers in three days. At 7 p.m. on Saturday down comes the Navigation Department's inspector, with his hydrometer, to watch you finish. 8.30, and she's nearly down. You watch the marks closely, the inspector, grimly impassive, giving you no assistance.

"Can I put another truck in, sir?" I ask.

"You're loading her, mister, not me," is his discouraging reply.

You test the water with your hydrometer. Ah! Brackish. She'll stand it. So. Another? H'm! Something in the inspector's eye warns you, so you say "No" reluctantly to the impatient head-stevedore, for you're due for a wiggling if this cargo's a waggon short of last voyage's.

"Um!" says Mr. Inspector musingly. "If you'd put that aboard, mister, I'd have made you dig it out again." Helpful!

I had that sort of thing to put up with from the same man seven voyages running. I used to pass watches at sea comforting myself with dreams of punching his head, and trying to think of some way of upsetting him. No go! All the annoying power possible was his.

At 9.30 the head stevedore reports the cargo all trimmed down. Tide's at 11.0. Right! You go to turn out all hands and find them dead-oh. After much shaking, you manage to get four more or less fit for duty, albeit soreheaded and groggy on their pins, so you make a start getting hatch-beams on. Fore and main hatch iron-work is in place, when the skipper and pilot hurry aboard.

"Single up, Mr. Senex."

"Ay, ay, sir!" (Sotto voce: "God's curse to this infernal life.") Then, with a roar, "Break off there, and stand-by fore and aft."

Just singled up, when a sound like a mill wheel is heard, and Brown's old "Bungaree" comes alongside and makes fast.

"Let go fore and aft!" and away we go with a dismal shriek from the steam whistle, which,

with water in the pipe, makes a snarling sound aptly expressive of our own feelings.

There's a lop of a sea outside the breakwaters, and the five derricks we still have up sway dangerously—to say nothing of the funnel, the guys of which are yet adrift. However, we drop anchor outside and all hands spend the night very pleasantly till nearly daybreak, securing gear, sorting out hatch covers and getting them on, setting up back stays, and so on.

A short spell of broken sleep, then, at 8.30 a.m. on this restful Sunday we finish clearing up the decks and wash down. Skipper comes aboard at noon, with all his papers in order. A hurried lunch, last letters handed to the agents' clerk; farewell! Up anchor, and so away again to sea—for a rest!

Thus it goes on, voyage after voyage the same. I had nine trips to Valparaiso and back, and it nearly broke both health and heart before I managed to cut the bonds and free myself from such slavery. The owners gave me £10 a month as mate and no overtime for any of us, till we kicked like hell and threatened to go on strike; then we got 1/- an hour! and were looked on as mutinous.

A nightmare of a life. And though things are better now, I believe, than they were in my day, still it's past and done with for me, thank God!

CHAPTER II.

ONE NIGHT IN PORT JACKSON.

EIGHT bells, noon. Our steamer, twenty-six days out from Talcahuano, lurched and rolled under the rapidly expiring influence of the snorting sou'-easter which had dogged us all the way across the Pacific. Ahead, clear-cut and blue in the rainwashed atmosphere, a stretch of the New South Wales coast. A point on the port bow, a little white finger pointing upward.

Sydney! The very thought of the place warmed our hearts with visions of the rest, beer, girls, picture palaces, newspapers and so forth, according to the particular bent of the individual seaman.

Magic name! The growling A.B.'s grew suddenly good-tempered, and evinced a certain alacrity in obeying orders from which nearly four weeks' bad weather had divorced them. Occasionally they even smiled. The skipper grew cheerful, and the mate (me) ceased his everlasting faultfinding, and cracked a mild joke with the men now and again—which called forth its due meed of obsequious merriment. Once he even said, "It's going to be a fine evening after

all, Mac," to an engineer, who nearly fell over his doorstep with the shock of being addressed with courtesy for the first time in a month.

Heavily our old hooker wallows along, and we raise the land fast.

"Anchors all ready, Mr. Senex?" from the skipper.

"All clear, sir."

"Right! See everything ready for the pilot."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

A half-hour passes, and South Head is close aboard, the surf breaking high. Another few minutes and the "Captain Cook" slides in a piratical fashion from behind a rock and makes for us. After some difficulty, for we are light ship and rolling heavily, the pilot hops aboard.

"You're to go up to Woolwich, Cap'n. The dry dock's all ready for you. Full ahead, please. Port a bit," and we make for Watson's Bay. A little manœuvring, then—"Stand by your anchor. Let go!" and away goes the mudhook with a roar and a cloud of rust-dust.

In another few minutes a smart launch comes alongside, and the port medical officer mounts the side-ladder, slowly and majestically, as befits his official dignity. He's a broth of a boy all right—the biggest man I ever saw, I think. He looked about eight feet, and built in proportion. His boots would have made a London policeman green with envy, and he had a fist like a boxing-glove. Big as he was the suit he had on that day was too large, and hung on him like a purser's shirt on a handspike. A sport though, he took

the rather audibly expressed surprise his appearance created in the mustered lines of the crew in good part, and proceeded to examine us for small-pox symptoms. A pause. Then the captain—"Where's the second engineer? Mr. Senex, I thought you had seen——"

"ALL right, sir. I'll go and rouse him up," and away I went.

Diving down the engineroom ladder, I find Mr. Crafter frantically tugging with a spanner at a refractory nut.

"Doctor's waiting, Crafter."

"Blast the doctor!"

"Right-o, old chap," I answered; "but the skipper sent me——"

"Tellim t' goter'ell!!" (Here the nut gave suddenly, and he sat down—hard.)

From the safe altitude of the first grating, I said sweetly, "All right, old man; I'll give him your message. Er—did it hurt?" and raced up the ladder just in time to miss the flying spanner.

Crafter came up, sweating and purple-faced, grumbling about disturbing men at important repair jobs, was pronounced free from small-pox, and instantly returned to his labours.

Medical and Customs inspection were over by 4.30 p.m., when we got under weigh, and proceeded up the harbour. Its beauties were even more enticing than usual to our sea-pickled eyes, as we slowly passed point after point, finally bringing up alongside the wharf at Woolwich Dock at tea-time. By this it was nearly calm, just a faint breeze wrinkling the placid water,

and the sky cloudless. The daylight gradually merged, through dusk, into the soft radiance of a glorious full moon.

I leaned on the rail, drinking in the calm, peaceful beauty of the night. Across the water the innumerable lights and subdued hum of the city, the coloured lights of the moving shipping here and there, and the white reflection of South Head in the distance, the broad path of moonlit water, broken every now and then by a brilliant firefly of a ferry boat streaking across it. Nearer at hand, rocky, brush-covered points, romantic and inviting. Above all, and pervading everything, the subtle perfume of the faint breeze—a scent of flowers, hay, gum leaves, and warm rich earth, the very breath of the Goddess of Health. I don't know how long I stopped there, dreaming and thinking of the contrast between this haven of peace and the last month of turmoil, before I woke to the fact that I was dog-tired and had better turn in. Couldn't sleep, though. An hour or so of restless tossing about, and I was out again—the night more beautiful than ever. There was another form leaning on the gangway, pyjama'd, like myself.

"Hello, Crafter—that you? Isn't this just A1 at Lloyd's?"

"By jingo, Senex, you've said it. A chap ought to be shot for sleepin' on a night like this. What say we clear out and go up country, eh?" (with a laugh).

"Dunno about that; but are you game for a stroll ashore?" I asked.

"Right you are!" And away we went.

We met nobody. There was no Caliban of a John Hop to point out the impropriety of our appearance on a public road in pyjamas and carpet slippers, and we walked on up Hunter's Hill way, Lane Cove glimmering through the trees on one side and the sweet-scented brush on the other. We fairly bathed in the beautiful night, plucked handfuls of gum leaves and buried our noses in them. We wandered on until the declining moon warned us it was time to get back. We reached the ship again about 3 a.m., and had no difficulty in getting to sleep this time.

That glorious night! It will live in my memory, for then and there was born the idea—not so long afterwards acted on—to say good-bye to the sea life and crowded old England, and make a home for myself in this wide, free young land. I have never regretted doing so.

I have had seven years of the hardest kind of pioneering, in a heavy scrub district, and am not so very well off, financially, now; yet, if I knew I was to have another similar period on top of this, and I could have a good competence living in any other country in the world by asking for it to-morrow, I'd choose Australia and the pioneering without a second's hesitation. And that's what I think about it!

CHAPTER III.

GOOD-BYE TO THE SEA.

AGAIN we were approaching the Australian coast. On this trip from Valparaiso we had experienced fine weather, for a wonder, and made (for us) a record run of twenty-five days. The weather had been beautifully fine.

A faint breeze right ahead brought us a heart-quickenning perfume—that smell of the land which even the most desert place seems to possess, and which only the “deep-waterman” knows how to appreciate to the full. Your landlubber’s nose couldn’t detect it. As I climbed to the bridge after tea, and took a good long sniff of it, I determined that this would be my last trip. To the devil with ploughing the raging main! It would be ploughing the flowering earth after this, I thought.

Out of the South-East a long, low swell came slowly sliding, telling of wind to come, which we would just escape, and making our old hooker roll regularly and not at all unpleasantly. Silence; broken only by the quick muffled beat of the propeller, or the musical tattoo of a fireman’s shovel below, indicative to the trimmer that more coal is wanted in the stokehold; or by a sudden laugh

or burst of rough song from the fo'c'sles. I strolled back and forth on the bridge, thinking how sick of the sea I was, and scheming how the devil to break my iniquitous three years' agreement without going to the length of deserting.

Slowly dusk settled down, and the brilliant colours of the sunset faded out. No land yet. Heigh-ho! Well, 'twon't be long now, and please the pigs, I won't leave it again once I get my hoofs on to it. Suddenly the captain's voice broke in on my reverie.

"If you don't sight Sugarloaf by eight bells, Mr. Senex, pass the word to the third mate to keep a bright lookout, and let me know when he sees it."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

More reverie, leaning on the rail gazing ahead. Now, if I'd a farm, I'd put in ten acres of spuds, and get so many tons, etc., etc., and there'd be a couple of cows to milk, of course, and the girl 'ud be in the house singin' away and I'd get a good night's sleep instead of this cursed turning out every time old Fuz-buz wants you and I'd have a few quid in the bank likely; different to this tenner-a-month job, and——

Seven bells! "All's wel-l-l-," in musical cadence from the crow's nest. Right!

A few minutes later, and a momentary faint glow on the rapidly darkening horizon attracted my attention.

"Ha! Revolving light. That's her."

I sent down to the captain, who came up at

once and took a squint through the night glasses. "All right. Sugarloaf. How's her head?"

"S. 69 degrees W., sir."

He takes a bearing and pops below. A moment later—"Steer 72 degrees, Mr. Senex."

"Seventy-two degrees it is, sir," and course altered accordingly.

Sometime in the wee small hours beyond twelve I am roused out by the sudden stoppage of the ship's steady heart-beat, and find we are off Newcastle, burning a blue light for the pilot, who comes out to us in a few minutes, and we are soon anchored off the Dyke, pending medical inspection later in the morning. On this occasion the fumigation launch, with its cargo of brimstone and crew of attendant imps, left us in peace for the time being. We got it before noon though, as usual good and hearty, and ate our lunch with streaming eyes and rasped throats in, literally, a hell of an atmosphere.

When we went alongside to our usual berth in the afternoon we were informed cheerfully by the stevedore, as we were used to being informed, that we "would be away by Sunday."

"Not I, if I can help it," thinks I to myself. "How to get out of this damn ship without leaving my money behind?"

First I packed up all my gear; got the Customs to examine and pass it; engaged a launch to come alongside at a time when I reckoned the skipper would be up town; had the chests taken right up to the railway station, and consigned to Brisbane forthwith—to be left till called for. Thus I

committed myself: I couldn't go to sea without the garbage, and the same was safe and handy if I cleared out. I had made up my mind to do this if there was no other way, for I had just received news that my brother had got his second mate's ticket, and had cheerfully shouldered the responsibility of supporting our mother in England; and I had no other ties. Anyway I thought I would have a good showing with the medical officer of the port, for I had been troubled with migraine and nerve troubles for months—"all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" with a vengeance.

First, however, I put the acid on the skipper.

"Want to be paid off, sir; sorry, but really I can't stand this life any more."

"You? What? How the Sheol am I to get another man in your place?" he answered. "Why! Even if I could get a man mad or drunk enough to go on this run, I'd have to give him £12 a month, and what do you think the owners would say at my paying off a £10 man to engage another at £12? No fear, Senex, here you stay, old chap, and don't make any mistake about it."

"Thanks, sir. But look, er—you'd better look out for another man, sir, all the same."

"Humph!" and off he trotted ashore.

He was a decent chap to me, and I was sorry to give him trouble, but——

Here I may mention one of the injustices of English maritime law. On being engaged at home, one signs articles for three years. This is a survival of old sailing-ship days, when ships

were often away that period. Nowadays no man expects to be away anything like that time. If he did never a man would sign on. But if the ship happens to be pitchforked on to a run like this Pacific trade, well—there you are, stuck fast, and you can't get out except on one plea—a medical certificate of unfitness.

I went to the best private practitioner in Newcastle. He made a thorough examination, and gave his opinion that I had been for months unfit to hold my responsible position, and gave me a certificate to that effect. Armed with this, I again bearded the captain.

"No good, old chap," he said. "I'm sorry, but I have my own position with the owners to look at if I let you go."

So off I went to the port medical officer, a grave and courteous gentleman, who listened sympathetically to my tale of woe.

"Well," he said, "of course I can't possibly issue an order for your discharge if there isn't something radically wrong with you. You know that. However, strip, and let's have a look at you." A long examination, then, "Hum! There'll be no difficulty about *you*. Y'ought to have been out of it long since. But, understand now, I'm going to emphasize your attacks of migraine—blindness—and if you come here looking for a job again I won't pass you. You burn your boats behind you if I issue this order."

I was willing, and with the order for my discharge like a waving battle flag, I metaphorically knocked out the captain, who capitulated to that

mandate, and paid me off on Saturday. On Sunday morning, 28th February, 1912, I watched, from the balcony of my hotel, the old ship pass between the breakwaters and proceed to sea. I did have a pang or two, for she had been my home for four years, and I had enjoyed many a good time aboard her. Good-bye, old hooker, and good luck go with you! A last long look, and I slowly turned away and faced the unknown future. I was twenty-seven years of age, with £70 in my pocket, and all Australia to pick a home in.

"The chance of my life," I thought. "It'll be my own fault if I don't make the most of it." And so downstairs to lunch, the slight cloud of regret at leaving the old ship dissipating as I hummed to myself the sailor's chantey, "Off to Philadelphia in the Morning"—only it was Brisbane, not Philadelphia, in my case.

CHAPTER IV.

I BECOME A LAND-LUBBER.

WHEN I was a brass-bound apprentice on a wind-jammer, aged sixteen, I visited Melbourne on my first voyage, and became acquainted with the young lady who now enjoys the honour of being Mrs. Senex. Naturally then, when the idea of settling in Australia occurred to me, Victoria was the State I first thought of. I applied to the Government, stating my case, and their reply was a very distinct damper. Regarded in the light of a hint not to come, it was a verbal brutality:—

“The amount you mention is utterly inadequate to make a start in Victoria, and we should not advise you to leave your present employment until something more certain and easy eventuates.”

A distinct “Tite-Barnacle” flavour about it altogether. New South Wales was my next try. Far more encouraging. I could certainly come to that State; I would be put in touch with farmers in whatever district I selected, and when I thought I had enough experience to start for myself they would do their best to find me land. Also they sent me some pamphlets.

Then Queensland. Ah! that *was* something like a hospitable invitation:—

“Certainly you ought to make a decent start with the amount you mention. Even with nothing you are welcome if willing to work. We hope you will decide to come. . . . If you are not afraid of work and a bit of roughing it, you should command success,” and so forth.

Accompanying this missive was a parcel of pamphlets on which six shillings postage had been paid. So I reckoned Queensland was good enough for me, and it was—and is.

I watched my ship leave Newcastle on the Sunday. Next day I was in Sydney enquiring about a boat for Brisbane. It was the time of the Badger tram strike, and, as most people remember, shipping was being held up. However, the company I went to said they were running a special boat on Wednesday, and I might squeeze in. Went steerage, of course; had to study economy now. And it *was* a squeeze-in all right. She was an awful old tub. I won't mention her name. The steerage bunks were two high and two abreast—four in a section. My berth was on the cold hard deck under a bottom bunk, whose inhabitant had, of course, an unpleasant habit of spitting. Two blokes camped on the table, and several, like myself, on the deck. Well, I hadn't forgotten my old sailor dodge of “pricking for the softest plank,” so it was no particular hardship to me, and I passed a fair night.

I went on deck about 6 a.m., in time to see my old pal, Sugarloaf, abeam.

The weather was clear, blowing a bit, and a good lop of following sea. Breakfast was at 7.30. When the bell went I was on the fo'c'sle head, and waited a minute or two before leisurely descending. The mob was jammed round the table like peas in a pod, jaws working overtime, eyes hungrily roaming over the table, hands ever and anon reaching like talons for the eatables. I accosted the steward, poor man, who, with a care-lined face, was hovering round like an unquiet spirit.

"Can't help it, sir," says he; "you'll just 'ave t' do the same as th' others—grab what ye can, and Go delp the last man. Cripes! They are a 'oly lot er cormorants this trip."

So I grabbed a spud, a ragged lump of meat, and a hunk of dry bread, which were all I could effect salvage on, but it kept the worms quiet. After that I was always anchored in mid-table half an hour before meals, and held on like grim death against the rushing tide when the bell went. Very soon half of them were squatted round the table like vultures half an hour before time, so my dodge failed in the end.

They were a merry, rough, happy-go-lucky crowd. Mostly shed hands, rouseabouts and such-like, bound for Rockhampton and Townsville. They soon jerried that, if I was a pretty smart seaman, I was also an extremely raw new chum; and the old, old gohanna farm tale was sprung off on me with enthusiasm. I didn't know what

a blooming gohanna was. I was also advised to keep my eye open for a few likely-looking emus when I got settled, as there was good money in their plumes. I got a bit suspicious of fifty-foot carpet snakes, but swallowed cannibal blacks and crocodiles in the Atherton scrub. North of Townsville, I was informed, it rained for nine months, and then the rainy season started. I caused a good deal of amusement all right, and the roars of laughter might have been heard all over the ship when I mentioned casually that I had some heavy blocks ashore in my baggage, with a view to hauling down scrub timber. (N.B.—The blocks were stolen from my ship, but as I originally stole them from the Standard Oil Co.'s wharf in New York, I reckoned I'd a proprietary right to them. You'll find the mate of the average tramp an accomplished pincher. He's got to be, the way owners cut requisition lists). They enquired if I had any idea what scrub was like. I said "No, but I supposed it was just ordinary trees." More merriment.

It was late in the evening when we arrived in Brisbane. I got ashore at once, and chartered a cabby to take me to some decent place to camp. He did, and charged me five shillings for a five minutes' journey to that fine caravanserai, the People's Palace. Next morning I was early at Roma-street station, enquiring for my traps from Newcastle. They hadn't arrived, and wouldn't do so for a week or more—congestion at Wallangarra. Bestowing my blessing on the Railway Department, I strolled down to the Lands

Office, and interviewed the gentleman with whom I had corresponded aboard ship. Let me pay a tribute to his courteous urbanity, and the patience with which he answered the innumerable questions I was inspired with.

"Yes, Mr. Senex, Queensland has good soil . . . er—it is suitable for growing potatoes. Yes, it is possible to go dairying in the State. Orchards? Oh, yes! Fruit grows here," and so on.

How he must have laughed when the brand-new, fresh-minted, new chum left him! Well, I learned that among the earthly paradises abounding in Queensland the district of Atherton was, for climate, scenery and general farming purposes, the nearest approach to Heaven in the State. I could do anything there—grow my beloved spuds (my dad was Irish, by the way), or dairy, run an orchard, or raise chooks. In fact, the trouble was not so much what to grow as what not to raise, in case of swamping the market, off twenty acres.

Of course it was Atherton for me after that—you bet! Couldn't get there quick enough. I found time, though, to worry the Department of Agriculture a bit, and I have no doubt they were very delighted to see the last of the infernal bore who "wanted to know, you know," and wouldn't be satisfied with the assurance that Atherton *was* a good place.

"Yes; but," said the bore, "have you ever been there?" And when they said "No," the bore opined that they couldn't know so very much

about the place after all, and doubtless caused secret fist-shakings behind his unconscious back.

One brilliant gentleman told me he'd give me a half-fare concession to visit Gatton College next day, and, in the joy of getting something for nearly nothing, I forgot to worry them any more. The other gentlemen probably stood him a drink that afternoon.

I thoroughly enjoyed that trip, and it was queer to think that at Gatton I was further away from the sea than I had ever been since I was born, and I don't think I bored the College people. I was such a palpable "newey," with such an eager interest in everything and so easily entertained. I caused one of the principals a heart-throb though when he turned round and caught me clambering over the fence en route to pat old "Spec," one of the savagest bulls in Queensland, I think, standing treacherously quiet on the other side. I was hauled back by the neck, while "Spec" boomed his disappointment and pawed up the earth in showers. I would have liked to have stayed there a week, admiring the beautiful, sleek cattle and dropsical pigs, snoring in bloated contentment, but the setting sun and the 8 p.m. train took me back to Brisbane.

I went to the Lands Office next day and worried them some more. They gave me a railway concession as far as Gladstone, and I left, staggering under a pile of maps, plans and pamphlets, which I afterwards conscientiously waded through and finally used for papering the walls of my bush humpy to keep the draughts out.

About 9 p.m. that evening I boarded the Gladstone mail train, and found myself one of a herd of males penned up in a bare wooden "three-in-one" dog-box of a carriage, with a mouldy odour of mildew, sulphur and antediluvian "Flor-de-Cabbagios" hanging about it. A short wait, a long whistle, a jarring jerk or two, and we slowly rumbled out of Brisbane into the moonlit country, and into the romantic mystery veiling the unknown life before me.

CHAPTER V.

NORTHWARD HO!

THE train appeared to go very much faster than it really did, being rather a narrow-gauge line; still fungus didn't grow on the wheels. We stopped at every station, and each stop was hailed by the same enquiry from a half-sozzled bloke in our pen, "Say, g-guard, thish-h North Pi-ine?" When we got there he refused to believe it, saying he didn't "re-rec-kernize" the place. Guard whistled, waited for the engine's answering toot, then hauled the beery one out by the scruff of the neck, jumped aboard, and left him squatting on the gravel.

The press eased at every halt, until finally there were only half a dozen of us left. I amused myself for a while gazing at the countryside lying calm and peaceful in the moonlight, as we rattled along. Then, just as I was thinking about forty winks, up spoke an old chap in one corner, grey-bearded, sunburnt, and attired in dungarees, grey woollen shirt and patched coat.

"Look, blokes! I' ben sufferin' torches with these 'ere dam boots all day, and I'm goinner take 'em orf."

"All right," we grinned; "fire away, Dad."

He shed his canoes, disposed of his "torchered" feet comfortably along the seat with a sigh of relief, and proceeded to fill a villainous old pipe, which presently filled the carriage with fumes.

"Py yingo, Dat!" said a stout, good-humoured Swede next me. "You' tobaggio schmells stronk. Fot brandt is 'e?"

"It's good ol' R——," said Dad, slowly removing the pipe from his gills and waving it about to point his remark. "Some people ses it stinks, but they won't give it a fair go. It'll do me. Smokes good, 'n only 'bout 'alf the price of the other stuff, and grown and mannyfactered right 'ere in the country. I likes it all right."

I asked him for a pipeful to try, and he shoved a plug across. I found it all right, in spite of its strong reek, and have always smoked it since. Subsequent experience makes me think that if Australians only would try their own country's productions a bit oftener, there might be perhaps fewer strikes and more work to be got. However——

"Noo chum, ain't yer?" asked Dad, as I handed his plug back.

"Yes," I answered, "bound up for Atherton."

"Ah!" he returned, "that's the place fer cows n' corn;" then, puffing at his old gumbucket with drowsy contentment, "I mind when I wis up there in '90 . . .," and a small flow of anecdote. He was an accomplished raconteur; had been all over Queensland, mostly mining; possessed the usual retentive memory of the illiterate, and really turned

out to be what in more polished circles is usually referred to as a "charming old gentleman." He told us most interesting yarns of his experiences. Mines, sheep, prospecting, scrub-felling, fire and flood—pretty well everything. I must say though that he didn't string me on, but, knowing where I was bound, gave me some sound advice which I laid to heart.

Thus we passed the night, yarning, smoking, dozing; while the train rattled and bumped along. Going up a steep grade somewhere near the Glasshouse Mountains, the carriage got quite a perceptible tilt fore and aft, and the long series of terrific jerks the engine gave, in her efforts to negotiate the pinch, brought my heart into my mouth thinking what would happen if a coupling broke and sent us adrift back down the grade. Daybreak showed us scrubby, measly-looking forest country, flat and uninteresting. Then, about 10 a.m., Bundaberg. A wash, some tea, and a bit of a leg-stretcher along that fine wide avenue, Bourbon-street. Back to the train, more hilly stretches of forest gradually merging into the dismal mangrove-bordered mud flats, and we slowed down and brought up at Gladstone.

Into the main street I went under the guidance of my fellow-travellers, three of whom were Gladstonians, and popped into a pub for lunch (*only* for lunch, of course), where my Scandinavian acquaintance, who possessed a quiet sort of dry humour, created a bit of a disturbance. The dining room was full. Soup was served, the hostess, distinctly an Irish woman, personally

attending to us. Olaf smelt his soup, made a face, cascaded the liquid with his spoon, and generally made it apparent that something was wrong. The hostess, with the danger-signal flying in her cheeks and all the room's attention attracted, bore down on us.

"And is the soup not t' yer liking, sirr?"

"Vell, ma'am," said Olaf, "do you know fot dey gall dis stupf een *my* contree?"

"An'-phwat-wud-they-be-afther-callin'-the-good-soup-in-yeer-counthry?" with terrific emphasis.

"Soup, ma'am!" said he quietly, and went on drinking it with gusto, for it was good.

Not quite in the best of good taste, perhaps; but the roar of laughter was good to hear, and the hostess joined in with a good-humoured, "Gwan wid ye, y' heathen."

Lunch over, we boarded the train again for the ten minutes' run to the long curve of wharf where the A.U.S.N. boat was lying. A few minutes' bustling confusion, whilst we burrowed in the heap of baggage for our personal belongings, and I superintended the embarkation of my chests, which had miraculously turned up from Wallangarra the previous afternoon. Then myself, Olaf and old Dad boarded the steamer; they were bound for Townsville. Half an hour sufficed to get the mail bags and some odds and ends of freight aboard, then again I heard the old familiar orders, "Single up!" "Let go aft!" etc., and felt quite out of it because it had nothing to do with me. Away we went down the harbour, and bore

up towards Mackay as the sun slowly sank behind the landward hills.

It was a fine night, and after tea I spent a good while promenading the poop, watching the dim shapes of the points of land coming abeam and passing in slow procession astern. I built many castles in the air, and I smile as I think how many fortunes I made between Brisbane and Cairns. But wouldn't life be a dreary business if a bloke didn't let his thoughts take wing occasionally and let him forget the monotonous grind of daily routine?

Hallo! Six bells. A musical call from the look out, the staccato answer from the bridge, and I went below, tumbled into a sufficiently comfortable bunk and knew no more until the morning.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PROMISED LAND.

I THOUGHT Townsville the hottest place I'd ever struck (I hadn't at that time experienced a summer north wind in Melbourne; that pleasure was reserved for the week I spent down south when I got married), and caught myself finding points of similarity between it and Aden; rather unfairly though, for later on I found Townsville to be not too bad at all; also there are a lot more trees and green stuff than one would suppose, looking at the place from seaward. On arrival we transhipped into another little steamer running up to Cairns. Had time for a run round town, and a raid on a fruit store; then all aboard! and away we went, rushing frantically North at the furious speed of nine knots.

For a wonder our tub arrived in fairly decent time in Cairns, 6 a.m. to be precise, and I had to fly round to collect my gear, and get up to the station in time for the 7 a.m. Atherton train. I only got a fleeting glimpse of Cairns on this occasion, but subsequent visits gave me the impression of a rather warm but very pretty little town, with wide, well-cared-for streets, some fine buildings, plenty of splendid old shady trees, and

innumerable gardens in a riot of tropical colour. The mosquitoes are a bit hot though.

Our train, after passing through some swampy-looking, flat, scrubby country, got into a teeming tropical wilderness of green. Houses embosomed among cocoanut palms and mango trees—canefields, banana and pineapple plantations line the railway on both sides. Pity though, as I found afterwards, that such a large Chinese element is settled hereabout. The heathen shouldn't have so much of such a brilliant, beautiful Paradise.

After leaving Freshwater, the line starts to ascend. You look ahead, and see the high range, with a huge cleft in it, up which the line goes—the Barron Gorge. Here and there landslides disclose the rich red soil, contrasting vividly with the lavish tropical green clothing every foot of ground. The grade becomes steeper, and the panting engine seems to have all her work cut out. Higher and higher, past a brilliant jungle of wild mangoes, bananas, ferns, figs and strange beautiful flowers. Now the great cliff towers hundreds of feet over our heads, and on the other side is a sheer drop of more hundreds into the brawling torrent below. Soon the tunnels start (eleven, I think it is) in quick succession.

The first voyagers along this line (I, of course, being one) stop out on the platform. The sophisticated stay inside and close doors and windows. We soon learn why, for in each tunnel we outsiders are subjected to a machine-gun fire of hot cinders and flue from Puffing Billy ahead. How-

ever, the glimpses of the Gorge, Cairns and the sea—'tween tunnels—are well worth getting smutty for.

Now the tunnels are left behind at an elbow of the Gorge, and the view from here is really magnificent. You must be six or seven hundred feet above the river bed, and can view its sinuous course to the sea, through the rich cultivated lands below, all bathed in the brilliant sunshine. That white cluster is part of Cairns, and the huge blue plain of sea makes a background to a picture hard to beat. There are several places between this point and the Falls, where (provided one is not a lady) one could lean out and spit 700 feet into the river, if you felt so inclined or your pipe turned dog on you.

On the other side of the train a chaotic waste of huge grey boulders—up, up, up—until you rick your neck looking to see how high they do extend. Still the prolific vegetation, with different types appearing now. The other side of the gorge from the river level to summit, and right and left as far as you can see, is one unbroken, close-packed mass of timber of a rather sombre sage-green foliage. Miles upon miles of it—and still we import timber into this benighted country. When will we get sense enough to hang instantly anyone describing himself as an importer?

We cross several spider-web-looking trestle bridges, then pass the lovely little Stoney Creek falls, streaming like a white lace curtain into a limpid pool below, and so close to the train that

after a heavy rain storm the spray wets the carriages. A very sharp curve, past Red Bluff, where the big landslide occurred some years ago; another curve back, and we are in the Upper Gorge. Instantly a distinct drop in temperature is apparent, and a cool refreshing breeze fans the heated brow. A few minutes more brings us to the Barron Falls; so close that seemingly one could jump from the carriage into the—well, the place where the falling water ought to be, and is—in flood time only.

Ordinarily the falls are disappointing. All you see is a long, broad slide of blue-grey, water-polished rock, going almost sheer down some 750 feet or so, with a few comparative trickles flowing down. See it in flood though, in the early months of the year, and nothing could be grander or more imposing. The train fairly rocks to the earth-shaking crash of the mighty mass of water. The noise is literally stunning.

We are on the Tableland now—level country more or less right through to Atherton. From Kuranda on it is somewhat monotonous forest country, until after passing Rocky Creek I espied a cultivated plain, with a grey wall of high timber, close, compact, apparently impenetrable—the Scrublands at last!

My heart bounded as I looked at it. I had been told of its enormous timber, with gruesome tales of accident and mischance falling it. When you chopped trees from a springboard, I had been informed, you had one foot in the grave, and the other on an orange peel. But it was so new

and enchanting to me. I wanted to get at it now! at once!

We were presently in the maize country. It looked beautiful. Miles of waving, dark green, tasselled corn just cobbing. Past Tolga, then a short ten minutes' run, and Atherton at last about one o'clock. I bolted some lunch, then, with a map of the district I wanted to see first under my arm, dived into the local Lands Office.

"I want to see this place, please. How do I get to it?"

"Oh, ah, yes! Not a bad district. Bit far out, but perhaps it is the nearest to the railway at present. Well, the Malanda train leaves at 3 p.m. Enquire for John Raynor at your station. He'll show you round."

"Oh, good. I can get to my station to-night easy?"

"Yes; there's a pub there. Just come up?"

"Only arrived this morning."

"Oh, well, glad to see you, and we hope you'll stop up here. Anything we can do for you, you know——"

"Thanks. I'll remember. Good-day," and away I went.

Three o'clock couldn't come quick enough. . . . Into the train . . . Cornfields again . . . Tolga . . . more corn . . . thick belts of scrub close aboard both sides. Then grass paddocks, with cattle knee-deep in the rich herbage, gazing at us with round-eyed nonchalance as we rattled by. Ah! So this is the famous Atherton country, eh? Well, it looks good.

Here's my station. Out I tumbled with my luggage. At last! I made my way to the pub and enquired for Raynor, who was away, but would be back to-morrow, so I put up there for the night. It was a rough shop in those days. Some timber cutters and teamsters were in town (one pub and the station), and most of them were half-seas over. Consequently it was about 1 a.m. when I got to sleep. Never mind; to-day I would see my selection. The country looked so good to me that I thought the devil himself wouldn't drag me out of it.

If I could have seen the future! Well, I don't know. I think I'd have gone on with it. Anyway, I'm glad I did. Who'd sell a farm to go to sea?

CHAPTER VII.

MY SELECTION.

BRIGHT and early I was out, and had a plunge in the beautiful clear creek running nearby. Let me say here that the permanent clear sandy creeks are one of the chief attractions of the Tableland. Practically every selection has one. Most have two or three.

I got back to the pub in time to greet Raynor. Someone in the train the previous day had told him about me, and he had ridden in early to see me. He was a tall, dark, stoutish man, good humour writ large over his rather weather-beaten face. He was clean shaved, save for a scrubbing brush under the nose, and was somewhat untidily dressed in the prevailing style of grey flannel and dungarees. He gave me a good firm hand grip (I loathe your bloke who tenders you a limp lump of dough).

"Cheero, bloke," says he; "I b'lieve you're goin' to settle out 'ere?" His voice was very high-pitched, and he spoke with a drawl.

"Yes," I said. "That's if I can get a block."

"You'll have no difficulty," he answered. "There's whips o' blocks out back o' my place, and y' oughter find one to suit."

"How about 48?" I asked. This was one I had picked on, when poring over the multitudinous plans and descriptions I got in Brisbane.

"It's a goodey," he said. "I reckon about the best one left for soil and handiness, but there ain't no mill timber on it."

"Oh, blow the timber! I want a block of land."

"That's the sort," he replied. "Well, look. I can't go out with you to-day, but you go right out to Liston's place. Ye can't miss the way; just foller the wheel tracks. Y'oughter get there by one o'clock, and you'll find a bloke there called Terry O'Gorman. He'll put you right. His block's next 48."

"Good-oh; thanks," I answered. "Comin' in to breakfast?" (as the bell went).

We went in, and during the meal he gave me a lot of information about the district and my future neighbours. He gave me the impression of being a quiet, shrewd, straight sort of a fellow.

Breakfast over, Raynor bade me a cheery good-bye, and I prepared for the tramp. New dungaree pants, new thunder and lightning striped cotton shirt, new tan leggings, sparkling new billy in one hand, and a shot-gun in the other—in case I saw anything to shoot en route—and a black hard felt hat! Verily a Verdant Green among new chums.

The folks at the pub all came out on the verandah to see me off. I thought, English fashion, they were good simple people, and kind to give me a send off. Oh, Lord! *I* was the simpleton,

and they were enjoying the joke. By the way, a week's sojourn here thoroughly eliminated that "superiah" feeling—much to my benefit. In this new life the people were all *my* superiors, and I mighty soon recognised it.

Off I set. The track led through open forest, skirting the scrub, and if there was ever a better imitation of a switchback, I want to know! Up and down, up and down, mile after mile, until I, unused to such toil, was nearly worn out. However, I came at last to a clear "pocket," where the road branched. "Ha!" I thought, "Raynor said it was only a mile and a half from here," and, turning to the right, entered the scrub. The track was only about sixteen feet wide, cut nearly straight. On either hand the impenetrable jungle of prickly undergrowth and close-packed huge trees towering a hundred feet or more overhead, shutting out the sunlight. It was beautifully cool, but the road, dry hitherto, was now very muddy, and I trudged on ankle deep, three steps forward and one back. Half an hour of this, then suddenly, like a door opening, I was out of the scrub, with a big grassed clearing either side of the road, and several little houses in sight. The second was Liston's, and I reached it in a few minutes. A rosy-cheeked woman, with several fine sturdy youngsters standing shyly behind her, greeted me.

"You'll be Mr. Senex? My name's Liston. Mr. O'Gorman'll be here in a minute. He's just up the paddock with Dad. Come in; I'm sure you're dyin' for a drink o' tea."

I just was. I think that tea and home-made bread and butter were the sweetest things I ever tasted. The house was built of rough split timber, adzed slab-floor, iron roof, with an open fireplace and big "colonial" oven taking up all one end. Though so rough, it was spotlessly clean, and woman's hand, with a little drapery, a few framed prints and knick-knacks, had made it look comfortable and homely, as no mere man ever could. While I was enjoying my tea I heard a snort outside, and presently the house quivered perceptibly. I looked up in some surprise.

"It's all right," laughed Mrs. Liston. "It's only ol' Biddy scratchin' herself. Come here, Bid!"

I stared, thinking it queer that one lady should so openly speak of another's little idiosyncrasy, until I saw a horned head appear in the doorway, and I knew Biddy for the family's pet cow. The laughing children swarmed over her, to show me how quiet she was, climbed on her back, hung round her neck, gave her crusts, and so on, the cow taking it all quietly, licking her nose with about a yard of raspy tongue, and looking at the kids with a calm eye like a benevolent old grandmother. Truly a domesticated animal!

Presently Dad and O'Gorman came home. Dad was a tall, thin, sinewy man, with sandy hair and moustache, his tanned face making the blue eyes look strangely piercing. Very Scotch and very quiet, and, like all pioneers with wife and family dependent on their exertions, with many worry-graven lines on his forehead. Behind him was a large merry, red face, like a harvest moon,

ornamented by a drooping yellow moustache and a broad grin. Surely, I thought, this must be the home of good-tempered men, and this O'Gorman is the happiest-looking bloke I've seen in years. He was over six feet, strongly built, active, and, like Raynor, his chum, had that sunny nature that nothing ever seems to put out. They welcomed me warmly, and, after a little talk, told me it was too late to go out to my fancy for a block that day, but I could stop there overnight and go out next day. Meanwhile I could come up into the bush and watch the men chop scrub. They had a bite, then took their axes, and I went with them to where they were chopping. It had been brushed (i.e, undergrowth chopped down), and didn't look too bad. I eagerly watched them, fingers itching to get hold of an axe. It looked easy enough. One or two trees came down, and I could contain myself no longer.

"Let me have a go, Mr. Liston."

"All right," he laughed. "Don't cut yourself though."

He stood by me while I bogged in. Half a dozen chops, and they started laughing. The cut, instead of being smooth, like a wedge out of a cheese, looked as if it had been chewed—all steps and stairs, top and bottom. I got wild, chopped harder; the back of the axe hit the top of the cut, and down she slithered, the point going through my boot, making a painful cut. They were much concerned, till they saw it was nothing to worry over.

"Never mind, old chap. We all had to learn.



I went with them to where they were chopping.

You'll have to start with a light four-pound axe. You'll soon pick up the knack."

I said nothing, thinking of the seven and a quarter pound one the storekeeper in Atherton had rung in on me. I spent the rest of the day wandering round the paddock and cultivation patch. They had plenty of vegetables growing with but little care, save keeping weeds down.

After tea we sat round the fire yarning, I giving some of my experiences and telling them of foreign countries I had visited. The kids listened wide-eyed to one who had actually been past Townsville, until the mother packed them off to bed. The night was spent comfortably enough in a bit of an outhouse, though I was disturbed several times by the infernal Biddy, who mistook my blanket for a new kind of fodder.

In the morning the kids roused me out early, and I went with the ragged, happy, laughing crowd to see Biddy and her mates milked. This looked easy, too, so of course I, eagerly thirsting for experience, had to try it. I couldn't get a drop, and presently Bid expressed her disapproval by putting her hoof into the bucket. After that I left matters to the juvenile experts.

What struck me most about the people up here is their fine independence. They don't make a calling stranger uncomfortable by apologies for their place, ostentatious dusting of seats, etc. You are welcome, as a matter of course, to pot-luck or the inevitable tea and cake, and if you don't like it you can go—courteously enough—to the devil; with no more fuss made over the

Governor-General than over a passing swaggie. Eager to offer and loath to accept help of any kind; treating mishaps and heart-breaking setbacks with a sort of humorous growling, having a sturdy determination at the back of it to make a do of things. A quiet people, without any of the facilities townsfolk consider essential, doing some of Australia's best work in their quiet way, for a return, during the first few years, that a "wage-slave" would laugh at.

O'Gorman took me out after breakfast, and we quickly entered a "pad" through the dense scrub. Oh, that journey! Steady heavy rain had set in; every blooming thing in the scrub seemed to have prickles on it, or else a sting, and I soon got scratched to pieces. Dodging a swinging lawyer-vine tendril, I ran my face on a stinging tree and was in agony all day. About an hour after this we debouched on to a twelve-foot wide muddy track.

"This is your main road," said O'Gorman.

I said, "Oh! Is it?" took a step forward, and instantly went over my knees in the mud. I struggled out, leaving a boot embalmed two feet deep in the process. I cut up a sugar-bag and tied this round my foot. We proceeded along the track, painfully crawling along the edges, since it was impossible to negotiate the river of mud that was "my" road. Deeper and deeper into the heart of the bush we went, the solemn green stillness unbroken save for a few musical bird calls. Muddier and muddier became the track, and lower and lower my heart until I was nearly in danger

of treading on it. Finally, panting and exhausted, we reached a big clearing, almost completely overgrown with sarsaparilla bush, inkweed and wild raspberry.

"Ah! Here we are," said my guide. "This is Braun's—next yours."

Again I ejaculated "Oh! Is it?"

We followed a pad through the weeds until we came to a dilapidated, mildewy slab hut. We entered, and were met by a dank, musty smell, like a vault, hinting at long absence of human inhabitants. Lizards and spiders flitted here and there on the walls; a black snake shot across the floor and dived through a hole; in the fireplace a rusty billy or two and the grey ashes of a fire dead these three years. The rain beat steadily on the roof, leaking through here and there with a dismal "plop," and a chill breeze breathed through the numerous chinks between the slabs. It was the apotheosis of misery.

"Mr. O'Gorman," I bleated, "did anyone ever really *live* here?"

"Of course," he answered. "I did; camped here wi' Braun six months. And, look, my name's Terry. Blow yer 'mister.'"

I laughed in spite of myself. "Righto, Terry. Well, let's go and view my estate."

We went down a chain or two further, and hit a fine, clear, rushing creek. On the other bank a dense jungle came down to the water, the edge a tangled mass of lawyer vines climbing half-way up the trees. Terry halted and, with a wave of his hand, invited my attention to that serried

bulwark of thorns, prickles and stinging abominations.

"There's your place, Charlie."

My heart was too full. "B-but what am I to do with it?" I wailed.

Here was a fine end to my dreams of fortune-growing spuds!

"Do with it!" he laughed. "Why! Get a brush-hook and axe, and a good load o' tucker, and bog in like a man. I'll give y' a week to give ye a fair start."

I turned away. Never shall I forget the helpless feeling of sickening disillusionment.

"For God's sake, Terry, let's get back," I said. And we went.

We said little on the return journey, reaching Liston's at dusk. I felt a bit better after tea. Next day was fine and bright. Terry was going to his place (across "mine" and the furthest out), and I went along. My spirits were better to-day, improving, like the landscape, in the sunlight. We had a rare feast of big ripe passion fruit growing wild on the creek, then crossed and examined the soil—good red stuff mostly.

Wandered round a bit, Terry calling my attention to the good water supply, and got a glimpse of some tall, ghostly Kauri pine; I felt some of my former enthusiasm revive. I turned suddenly to Terry.

"Begob, old man, I'll take it, and chance the ducks," I said.

"Good enough!" he answered, slapping my

back. "You won't be sorry, and neither will I, for I'll get a neighbour at last."

Back we went in the afternoon, after measuring off some of his scrub, and I went right into the pub to be on time for the Cairns train in the morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

I START AS A LANDHOLDER.

I WENT straight to the Land Commissioner in Cairns, and entered his office waving a map. "Look here, sir," says I, "I want 48. How do I get it?"

He laughed. Having got over the shock of my unceremonious entrance, he seemed inclined to enjoy me, setting to work to draw me out, not a hard task in those enthusiastic days. Toil, and long, close acquaintance with Cow, have soured me these times. He asked me what I intended doing with the land, and I at once plunged into a stream of talk which kept his eyes twinkling, and sent his hand to his mouth now and then.

"All right, Mr. Senex," he said at last. "There's nobody in for that block, so you won't have to ballot. I'll wire to Brisbane to-day. Come in again first thing to-morrow."

I paid my £5 deposit, thanked him, and withdrew. Next morning, bright and early, I was back, and shortly afterwards the return wire arrived from Brisbane that 48 was allotted to me. With a mind at ease, I spent the day wandering round town, got a skiff and pulled up

the Inlet, and otherwise enjoyed myself in my own way. A night spent in slapping myself and swearing at the mosquitoes, then breakfast, the Atherton train again, and so back to what I was beginning to regard as home.

I stopped overnight at the pub and made arrangements for my multitudinous baggage to go out by six-horse buckboard next day. What a load of useless gear I had, to be sure! It cost me about £8 first and last to bring the stuff up from Newcastle, and not half of it was any good. Next day it took us half an hour to load it all up, including a dozen ten-foot sheets of iron for a house sometime by and bye.

I enjoyed the trip in the forest country, but when we hit the scrub—oh, Lord! The panting prads dragged us up innumerable hills, and slid on their haunches down the succeeding pinch, with the buckboard skidding from side to side of the road after them. On the infrequent levels we went at a slow walk, half-way to the axles in sticky mud, numberless roots and half-submerged stumps, jarring and bumping, occasionally tilting our vehicle at an uncomfortable angle. Heavy going, all right!

We reached Braun's just before dark—it seemed to be at the end of the world after our journey—and found O'Gorman and a mate there, who were to commence falling scrub on the former's place next day. The stranger was introduced to me as Len Vincent, a fine young fellow about twenty years of age, tall, slimly built, active; all wire and whipcord; curly black hair,

thoughtful, dark brown eyes, and a full direct glance. An attractive young fellow and an excellent specimen of young Australia. The two of them had cleaned out the old shack, and, with a roaring fire going, billies boiling, whips of tucker, and a fine bright young moon silvering the clearing outside, the place looked cheerful—even comfortable; and I felt the old romantic feeling return in full force as we sat yarning and smoking round the comfortable blaze after tea. The night was just chilly enough to make the fire acceptable. The dense walls of heavy timber close at hand, the light breeze rustling through the treetops; the sound of the brawling creek, with its legions of croaking frogs; the call of a pair of mopokes, which sounded anything but dismal to me, and the wailing note of some other unknown night-bird in the depths of the scrub—all combined to make up a picture very strange and enchanting to me, who had been used to nothing but sea and sky for thirteen years. I had actually had only about four months ashore, in spells of a few days at a time, in all that period.

We were just thinking of turning in, when I nearly jumped out of my skin at a sudden grating, ear-splitting screech right overhead—to be repeated a moment later at the end of the clearing.

“What the devil’s that?” I asked.

“Oh,” said Len, “it’s only an ol’ fig-’awk. Bird, you know.”

Which reassured me. But it sounded like a

mad woman being tortured. I lay some time looking at the flickering firelight, and finally drifted off to sleep. About five minutes later I was roused by a clattering of plates, and, looking drowsily round, saw the fire blazing up, my two friends dressed and busy cooking. The buckboard driver was still snoring over in his corner.

"Hullo, chaps," said I, with some hazy idea that supper was on. "Aren't you turning-in to-night?"

"Turn in!" laughed Terry. "Why, it's 5.30. Time to turn out."

I jumped up. "Cripes! I thought I'd only been asleep five minutes."

Breakfast of cold salt beef, pickles, bacon, "puffaloons" (a species of fried scone), and unlimited tea was despatched with gusto, and the chorus of birds then warning us of impending daylight, off we set.

Those birds! I wonder now if there is any other country on earth with such a truly cheerful lot. First is the chowchilla—thousands of him in the scrub—with a rich musical note something like water dropping rapidly down a deep well—"Plop! . . . plop! . . . perloplop." He starts in the dark. Pewee is next; then the jackass heartily laughs the sleep out of his eyes, closely followed by the sweet-toned magpie. Presently another bird says "Gitterwoork!" in a tone of good-humoured reproach; don't know what his proper name is. We always call him the get-to-work bird. Finally the big pigeons, with their deep cooing notes, join in, and for an hour or

more this choir keeps its chorus going, to greet the sun as he slowly rises. There isn't a note in it that isn't cheerful, but as the district opens up, and the idiot with the gun gets his fine work in, I suppose most of them will depart. I have actually seen fools shooting ibises, on suspicion of their eating fruit and corn and distributing weeds, no less! not having the sense to see that the bird's long thin curved beak is incapable of negotiating anything but caterpillars, slugs and such-like. The old Egyptians knew how many beans made five when they declared this bird sacred, with the death penalty for killing one. Pity we didn't have some such law now to check the ass with the yard of gas-pipe.

We three, leaving the buckboard bloke putting his horses in, went across the clearing and through my scrub to Terry's place, getting soaked to the waist en route in the dew-laden grass. It was broad daylight by this time, and Terry was soon swinging "Douglas" (pet name for axe), and, on Len's introducing me to a brush-hook, we got to work on the undergrowth.

I don't know what malign imp presides over the brushing department, but no matter where or how you hit anything it invariably falls on top of you, and every damn thing has spikes on it. Well, the hooks were sharp, work went with a swing, a fresh breeze fanned our heated faces, and when Terry had the billy boiling at noon, his cheery shout of "She's off, boys!" ringing out through the trees, I ate the salt beef and damper,

and jam and damper, with an appetite I hadn't enjoyed for years.

A short spell, then work again, and by the time the setting sun said "knock-off," Len and I had chewed through a couple of acres, and Terry's splintery array of stumps showed that he hadn't been idle. Back to the barn, we rebuilt the fire, shook out our blankets to see no snakes were camped in them, had tea, yarned and smoked a bit, and, my heavy eyelids being quite incapable of being kept up longer, we tumbled into our "naps," and by nine o'clock were enjoying the untroubled sleep of healthily tired manhood.

CHAPTER IX.

CAMP LIFE.

NEXT day we all set to on my place. I solemnly allowed Terry the honour of cutting the first lawyer-bush on it. We found it fairly easy going, and, after getting a start, I kept on with the brushing, while the other two commenced falling. They bogged in to such good purpose that I had hard work to keep ahead of them, and by sundown there was pretty well an acre brushed and felled, and my heart swelled as I looked at it with a feeling of achievement. I really had made a start!

After this my two mates went on working on Terry's place and I on mine, being now fairly well qualified to use a brush-hook; we met at meals, and of course at night. I would be working away, not doing too bad, but thinking I was doing double it, when I'd hear Terry's jovial yell, "She's off, boys; she's off!"

Then away I would go twenty chains or so to where they were working, to find them just making a start. There's an attractive sort of picnicky atmosphere about these al-fresco repasts in the bush. There is the fire in front of us, to be care-

fully stamped out afterwards; the sooty billy full of tea, with a palatable little tang of wood smoke in it, stands near-by. We, each seated on a bit of bag, or our hat, lean comfortably against the spurs of the handiest tree, the overhanging dense foliage making pleasant shade. In front the fresh-fallen scrub sends forth its characteristic pleasant, sweetish smell. If you are on the side of a hill, you catch a glimpse, over your falling, of miles of rolling scrub—a tangle of all shades of green—with perhaps the blue hills in the far background. We have been working hard, and have appetites that many “townies,” having forgotten what it is like to be naturally, healthily hungry, refer to as savage or voracious. Our digestions might be worth a million dollars to the dyspeptic Rockefeller. Ergo, our beef and damper are food of the gods, and the black billy tea is pure nectar.

Presently the vacuums (abhorred alike by man and nature) being comfortably filled, we lay back and lazily smoke for a few minutes, watching the white Trade clouds sail majestically overhead. The snoring breeze fans our faces refreshingly; there are no mosquitoes in this favoured place to worry us; it is good to be alive. Then turn to again with a will, slog away till dusk, and so home to the old barn. If you feel like it, run down to the little flat on the creek, where Braun made a garden long ago, and various vegetables are running wild, holding their own with the weeds in this generous climate. We can always get a pumpkin, cucumber, or some chokoes and

beans. Then tea, yarn and smoke, perhaps a game of crib; turn in, read a bit, if not too tired; lights out, and a chorus of snores till morning.

This is in fine weather, like that first week I spent at the barn. When wet, like the succeeding month, well—that's a cow of another colour entirely. You go out grumbling, get wet through almost at once, and have to tramp back home for lunch. You spend half your time picking dozens of bloated leeches off yourself. Every rotten log you touch leaves a legacy of microscopic scrub-itch parasites on you, which drive you nearly frantic at night, until you bathe yourself in kerosene. The sky is a uniform sheet of grey; the trees become a dismal sage-green, half-hidden by the grey rain squalls drifting across the clearing. A dank weeping fog settles down 'tween squalls, which drifts in and wets everything. You are wet through, your pants cling coldly and stiffly, like canvas, and all is misery. Home at night, and the wood is damp and burns badly, emitting volumes of stinging smoke, which an erratic breeze blows back in clouds into the main room—to hang about in clouds impossible to dissipate. Your "nap" is clammy and uninviting. Everything feels sticky, as if wet sugar had touched it, and your best boots get covered with a green moss. But it's an ill wind, etc., and the neighbouring cow cockies screech with joy to see the grass grow an inch a day, as it can do up here, while their collective Strawberry likens herself unto a barrel of generous proportions, and her

udder swells beyond the (cocky's) dreams of avarice.

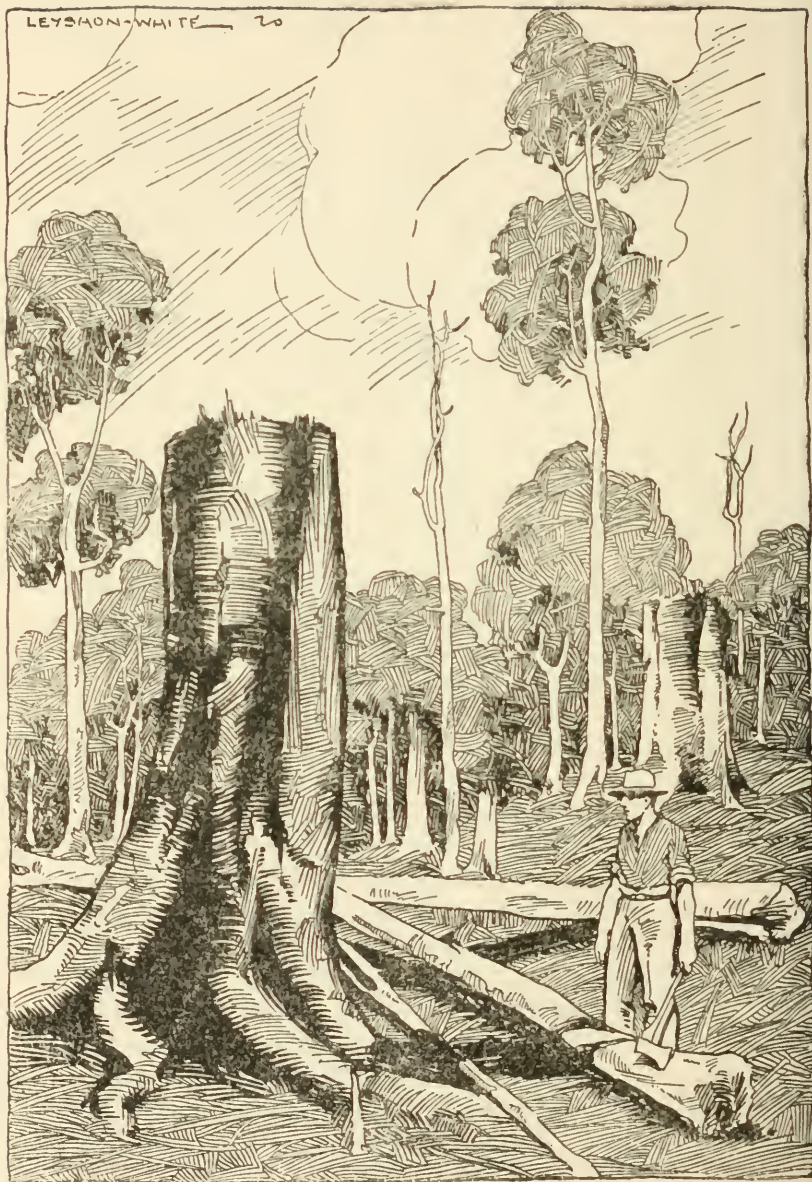
Frogs are a bit of a nuisance sometimes. They have a habit of coming into the camp o' nights, and often you wake with a start as something clammy and cold comes plop on your face or chest. Going out at night with a hurricane lamp, you tread on dozens. You can always tell when you tread on a frog. He goes "pop," like a cork coming out of a bottle. There are countless millions of them, all sizes and colours, from the great black fellow as big as your boot down to the beautiful little light green tree-frog, about the size of the top joint of your little finger. He's a handsome little chap, with two narrow myrtle-green stripes down the back, red gold shining eyes, and queer little spatulated fingers and toes.

We took it in turns to be cook of the mess, and a hell of a mess I did cook up, my first attempt at damper. However, I got into the way of it. and was soon a fair cook, even rising to the height of boiled puddings occasionally. Saturdays were washing days, and the three of us would knock off at dinner time, go down to the clear rushing creek, strip, have a "bogie," and wash the discarded change before donning the clean duds. Afterwards one of us would tramp two miles or so to where the storekeeper's cart came out, for the week's tucker. Sometimes he didn't come, and that meant a weary tramp of ten miles into the township, and a still wearier tramp back again, with perhaps a thirty-pound load slung on your shoulders, arriving back after

dark, utterly deadbeat, covered in mud from various and frequent falls. Queer how soon one learns to pick up a track. I used to wonder at first how blokes found their way round in daytime in the scrub; yet in three weeks or so behold your humble servant cautiously picking his way along a pad in the scrub at night, and getting through all right. It's a fool's game though in the dark, for if an old man carpet snake happens to be in your road, and you step on him, well—you'll get hurt!

I had a narrow squeak once. It was pitch dark, and I had just crawled through a slip-rail, making for a pad to Braun's, when I brought up all standing, with my outstretched hands on a horse's rump. Braun had come out on a visit to his place, and it was his frisky young colt that had poked his way through the scrub trying to get back. If that happened a hundred times, in ninety-nine the bloke would be kicked to death before he could say "knife." I was the lucky one.

I went on working for about six weeks, by which time I had some twenty acres brushed and two or three felled—not so bad for a new hand. Then one day I had a good long think over my affairs. It was mid-May, and my licence to occupy would not be issued before September. Until I had that document I would not be able to borrow from the Agricultural Bank, and my slender resources were reduced to about £20. Right here I made one of the biggest mistakes in my life. I ought to have stayed on, working



I had some 20 acres brushed, and two or three felled.

away and cutting expenses (one could live very comfortably on ten shillings a week those times) ; then in July gone down to the sugar mills below the range in the Mulgrave Valley, coming back at the end of the year to burn off, with a good cheque in my pocket, never being more than twenty miles away. Instead of that, I came to the decision to go South and get away to sea again for six months or so. Unfortunately, I didn't know anything about the Mills, and didn't like to palm myself off as an expert mill hand. I thought even the "rat-gangers" had to be skilled men. Afterwards I was one of a rat-gang myself for a while, and found one only had to be expert at "dodging Pompey." However, I had to learn by experience, so I let a contract to young Len to fall what I had brushed at thirty-five shillings an acre, paid him £16 in advance as *bona fides*, and the end of May found me in Townsville, dead broke, wondering if I'd have to tramp the way down to Newcastle, and how the devil I was to earn the cash to pay Len for the balance of my falling.

CHAPTER X.

COLONIAL EXPERIENCE.

IT was the first time in my life I had been "stoney," and I didn't like it a little bit—especially in Townsville, where there was so little doing at that time. I went down to the wharf, with some hazy idea of being able to stow away aboard one of the boats. Walking along pretty disconsolately, I came on a Liverpool tramp just completing discharging. "Ten to one," thought I, "she's bound for Newcastle. If only—well, here goes. They can only chuck me ashore." So I went aboard, saw the mate, and explained my position. He was kindness itself.

"Wait till I see the old man," he said. A few minutes' wait, then, "Come along. Skipper wants to see you."

I went up with him, and found the "old man" in the chart-house. A stoutish, good-natured man, with pince-nez and a black spade beard.

"Ah! good day, Mr.—er—thank you!—Senex. Have you your papers? Let me see them please."

A short investigation ; then to the mate, "All right, Mr. Andrews, make your own arrangements."

"Thanks, sir," said he. Then to me, as the skipper nodded and we left the chart-house: "Good enough, old chap. You'll take the settee in my room till we hit Newcastle. Run up town for your duds. We're sailing just after lunch."

I wrung his hand. Talk about thankful! I didn't waste much time up town, and got back aboard inside the hour. She was a happy ship, as is always the case when the skipper is a decent sort, and it was quite a holiday trip. Always having been a good hand with palm and needle, I managed to make myself useful during the passage. Arrived in Newcastle, I ceased to be a gentleman of leisure, and started that soul-wearying business—looking for a job. Nothing doing! So I borrowed a few pounds from the ship's tailor (I found now the advantage of always having dealt square when I was mate before) and went down to Sydney. Same thing there.

Oh! those weary, weary days, tramping round and trying to keep my appearance sufficiently smart. I always hated towns in general, and from that time loathed Sydney in particular, as being associated with my period of submersion. From sneaking furtively into sixpenny hash-joints I got to going in brazenly, and the day I spent my last sixpence I plumbed the depths by pocketing some slabs of bread off the table. I think I ought to say here that I was surprised at the quality and quantity of the grub these places dispense. Don't know how they do it at the price.

I'll bet there's any amount of men bless them—as I did—when down on one's luck.

That night I slept out in the open. I was really down now. Next morning I did what I ought to have done at once instead of wasting the time looking for an "officah's" job—went down to the wharves after an A.B.'s berth, and got it inside two hours. I kept the job until I got enough to pay Len for my falling. The ship was a collier running round to South Australian ports from Newcastle. Never once did she hit Melbourne, where the only girl in the world was, which was a sad disappointment; but still we lived well, had good times, and made good money—indeed, more than I was formerly getting as a deep-water mate.

Only one exciting incident occurred in the time I spent aboard, and that was one awful night in a heavy South-Easter off Montague Island, when some spare spars on the fore deck broke adrift. With the decks full of water, these charged up and down like battering rams, and started the bridge-deck bulkhead and fore-hatch coaming before we got them secured—a job which took all hands most of the night.

I left her early in October, sent Len his cash, then, as I wanted to try and get some cockeysing experience and, if possible, learn to milk before I returned home, I took a trip to the Richmond, having heard a lot of this splendid district.

Do you think I could get employment? Not on your life! I tramped on, trying place after place, offering to work for tucker just for experi-

ence, which only succeeded in arousing suspicion. Finally I drifted into Broadwater Sugar Mill, and became a member of the Rat-gang. Now indeed were the mighty fallen with a vengeance! It was £1 a week and tucker then, and the barracks were great barns, sub-divided into sties by walls of corrugated iron, whitewashed, depressing, hideous as the walls of Hell. There was a large element of Sydney tagrag and bobtail there, and one had an uncomfortable sort of feeling that one was in a species of chain-gang.

Yet even that place had compensations, and I have happy recollections of glorious Sundays spent lying naked on the splendid curve of beach between Evans Head and the Richmond entrance basking in the life-giving Australian sunlight, and every few minutes taking a header into the blue-green foam-capped breakers bursting on the sand.

I endured being in the Rat-gang until I had enough to pay my way North; then one glad day, when the sun seemed to shine once more, I turned my back on the place, and, with £5 in my pocket, cheerfully shouldered "Matilda," and turned my face towards Byron Bay. I had entered that mill a crusted Tory. I left it, well—I won't say an I.W.W. (not being quite a lunatic), but certainly a fervid Labourite.

I enjoyed that walking tour. Between Ballina and Byron Bay one gets some beautiful land and sea-scapes. I guess the bloke who rushes round in a motor car never has time to appreciate half

of what he goes to see. Tramping along on Shanks's pony one can stop and admire occasionally. I lay under the beam of Cape Byron light that night, slept like a top, and was up early next day to try and make Murwillumbah by dark. Didn't do it.

I crossed the lovely little Brunswick River by punt, and made the pace along the fine road winding up the height of land between the river and Crabbe's Creek. About half-way up, with a rock-wall overhead and a precipitous drop of some 300 feet below—no fence either—a trap overtook me, containing a little girl and a middle-aged lady. She pulled up, offered me a welcome lift, and I climbed aboard. There was a vixenish, sore-mouthed mare pulling us, and all went well until we reached the top of the rise. Here the old lady tightened her grip on the reins for the descent, and instantly the brute in the shafts shook her head, pranced about a bit, and at last fairly bolted down the long winding road, the trap swaying and skidding along behind. I shut my eyes at every curve. The old girl kept her head though, and with pale lips spoke quietly to the four-legged demon that was racing us to destruction. Then came a four-chain straight, with oblivion beyond, the road curving in so sharply that, looking down on it, one seemed to be going straight over the bump. I never felt so scared before in all my experience of close calls at sea, for I had always had to be flying round; while here I could only sit tight and do nothing, as I didn't know "B

from a bull's foot" about a horse, so couldn't offer assistance.

I was aroused from the contemplation of a sinful past by a snapped command from the lady. "Lean well in towards me!" I obeyed. The horse's head came level with the turn. She threw her whole weight on the starboard line, and we whipped round the curve like a shot, skidding fully six feet broadside on towards the edge, and—we were safe, for a long, straight, gentle grade led down to the level, and the frisky beast, having shot her bolt, so to speak, became amenable to discipline before we reached it. I left the trap near Crabbe's Creek station, paying the old lady a compliment on her splendid nerve. Cripes! There wasn't six inches between our wheel and the edge as we swung round that corner!

I got along at a good pace now, as rain was threatening and it was getting dusk, keeping my weather eye open for a likely place to camp. Presently a "tick-gate" barred the way, and just beyond was the tent of a road maintenance man, where I craved shelter for the night. With typical Australian hospitality he not only granted it at once, but insisted on my sharing his tucker as well. I was glad of the shelter that night, for the rain poured in torrents, and I slept all the sounder for the row it made outside.

Next morning I left my hospitable host and made tracks for the Tweed. Passed through Murwillumbah, a pretty little rather sleepy town, about noon, and boarded a boat for the Heads, being instantly asked for my fare, and regarded

with dark suspicion while I was forking it out. Got down to the Heads at 4 p.m., getting a glimpse of boiling white surf on the bar as we shot out of the swift current into a quiet little dock, where we disembarked, and once more my ready foot pressed the soil of Queensland.

CHAPTER XI.

HOME AGAIN!

I WENT straight across to the ocean beach, and swung along at a good bat over the hard sand of that beautiful curve of foreshore. Made my camp that night on the sand just south of Corrubin. The mosquitoes were as the sands for multitude and tigers for ferocity, and I went to sleep completely covered up, head and all. Damme! They bit through the blanket! Woke up somewhere about midnight to find it raining hard. Pitch dark, no shelter and no tent. What a night! I sat there in the pouring rain, huddled in a blanket, wet, shivering and miserable until dawn appeared, the sun, shortly springing from the ocean, bringing a fine warm day with him. I stripped, tied all my wet belongings to bushes, where they soon flapped themselves dry, and, as soon as I got sufficiently warm, raced across the sand and plunged into the foaming surf. Ten minutes in the water, then, panting and refreshed, I dived back and collected my duds. Was scrambling into them when I heard a chatter of voices, and a bevy of ladies with attendant squires, all in fantastic bathing rig, hove in sight on the

beach. Thank the Lord for those sheltering bushes! If I'd only been a couple of minutes longer in the surf—oh, Lord! I didn't have any bathing trunks. I didn't know of the big hotel on the creek just back of me.

That night sickened me of carrying "Matilda," so I took the evening train from Corrumbin, and arrived in Brisbane late at night.

On the journey an unpleasant, shabbily smart individual fastened to me. A terrible talker, whiskered, dressed in white ducks, with somewhat "busted" white pumps on his hoofs, and with a swaggering, boastful air, he combined a habit of pointing his remarks with a contortion of his features and a clearance of his nasal organs. Of course he was an importation, informing us in a loud voice that he was from 'Ome, and I blushed for him. He alighted for a refresher at nearly every station, having to race violently after the train, and board it under way. It got quite interesting at last to the other occupants of the carriage.

"He'll miss her this time." "Ay, she don't stop long here." "There's the whistle! He's done." "'Ere he is. Look at him running. Two to one he don't do it." "He will!" "He won't!" "He—begob, he's just managed it!" and presently the nuisance was among us again, stinking of whisky and more voluble than ever. He hung on to me until next morning, when he asked me as a special favour to lend him a pound. I told him his price was too high, but I'd give him five shillings to go away. He took it and went. He got to windward of me though, for I found when

settling up at the pub that he had told them "his mate" would foot the bill. I did so, to avoid trouble—like a fool. He had held forth on the train about his politics, which were Liberal; but his dealings with me were a regular War Profits Act.

At the pub I heard a chap asking for pick and shovel men for a job out Laidley way—rate eight shillings a day. I had heard a lot of this district, and thought it a good opportunity to see it and earn tucker as well, so I volunteered.

I stuck it ten days, being by that time so blistered, sore and generally used up that I could hardly crawl. I therefore handed in my resignation and left, richer by about £3, and the knowledge that the Atherton country looked heaps better than this, at that time of the year, anyhow.

I waited in Brisbane a while for a mate who wrote he would join me there and come North with me, but when my funds had reached £4 I gave him up, and cadged another railway concession to Gladstone from the Lands Department after making futile efforts to work my passage on shipboard. Got the boat at Gladstone and arrived in Cairns on 3rd December, 1912, with just enough to pay the fare to Atherton, where I arrived at noon next day without sufficient to buy a feed.

I slipped into the lavatory, hastily doffed my glad rags, and climbed into flannel and dungarees once more. Ten minutes after leaving the train I was gaily tramping the long road out to my

selection, my old friend "Matilda" caressing my shoulders, penniless, happy and blithely whistling, glad to think I would soon be home again.

I stopped at a cocky's house a mile or two out, and offered him an hour's work for a feed.

"Righto, bloke," he said. "Freeze on to Douglas there and cut us some firewood."

I cut him a good pile, and the decent pot not only gave me a good square feed, but enough to carry along for another as well. Armed with this I marched along to the Barron River, where I found the river was up owing to recent rain, and I nearly got drowned crossing the atrocious ford of slippery stones which the "powers that be" consider safe, wading waist deep in the rushing stream.

I finally reached the barn at 7 p.m., where I found Len and Terry just finishing tea. Their welcome made the welkin ring. I don't quite know what the welkin is, but anyhow it rang. And wasn't I just glad to get back to where I was known and there were friendly faces to greet me! We talked sixteen to the dozen, and at ten o'clock, with hearty good-nights, we turned in, and again I slept the heavy sleep of the tired under the hospitable roof of Braun's old barn.

CHAPTER XII.

SCRUB LIFE.

NEXT day I was up with the sun to see what my burn was like, Terry O'Gorman having let my place go when he burnt a fortnight before. I was assured that I had a good burn, but when I saw the black waste, gridironed with logs and strewn with big stumps, I was a bit dismayed. What on earth could I do with it to make a living? It looked pretty hopeless.

I tried to get a fire going round some of the big stumps, but, of course, they wouldn't burn, being too green. When I looked at the place, and thought how many years it would be before it was clear of refuse, it made me feel despairing. Of course, I know now that I had a really good burn, and was lucky, and that in five years I would be able to plough patches, with no other effort than dropping a match here and there, when the logs had rotted a bit; but experience has to be learned. I tried digging a patch, but that was hopeless, the ground being a network of roots, almost impossible to dig among; so I gave that up too. I could have planted corn easy enough; but then, even if the roads had been

decent, the price of haulage to the station would have been more than the crop would fetch; so there was nothing to do but sow grass in the clearing. Plenty of rain lately had brought Braun's paddock into seed, and I set to work to reap it. A week's work gave me more than enough to sow my burn.

Of course, I made a botch of the sowing at first, putting on about five times as much as was necessary, but soon got the hang of it, and a week's work finished it, a faint green sheen down on the creek showing that the seed was good and fertile. Then I got to work on a creek flat where the silt was piled high over the maddening roots, and got a number of vegetable seeds put in. All sorts of garden truck here grow prolifically, almost without cultivation. Terry and Len finished sowing the former's place same time as I did, and next day proposed a trip out to the Range by way of a holiday. As I hadn't been there I was eager to go.

The track lay through dense scrub all the way, being an old road well made forty years ago, and disused for a decade. It was used hauling cedar out to the Range, with a view to shooting it down the mountain side to the Mulgrave River, down which it would be rafted to the sea. As they salvaged only about one log in twenty the scheme didn't pay, so was abandoned, and the road, with its bridges and box-cuttings, went to ruin. We tramped along and, in an hour or so, saw, as through an open door at the end of the avenue of scrub, the sunlit grass of the open forest at the

range head, and a glimpse of a gum tree or two. Presently we were waist deep in the lush grass, clambering over the mouldering cedar logs lying there by the score, with the scent of the gums strong in our nostrils, and the shrilling of the cicadas nearly deafening us. A few minutes more and we were standing among gigantic granite boulders, looking down at such a glorious view as I had never seen before.

The Trade wind was snoring strong on this exposed position, and there was a champagne-like exhilaration about the slightly rarified, gum-scented air which set us laughing and romping like school-kids. The Range went almost sheer down 2000 feet or more to the Mulgrave Valley at our feet. On the other side, facing us, stretched a heavily timbered range of mountains. At each end to right and left was a glimpse of blue sea, and in the background to the extreme right the blue mass of Bartle Frere, Queensland's highest mountain. Winding along the valley floor ran the narrow violet ribbon of river, flecked with white here and there, where were rapids. I found it hard to realise that those low bushes were really tall trees, and that that narrow blue streak of water was half a mile wide in places. I think one could notice a man moving on the white sandbanks, the atmosphere is so clear. Away to the left, where the valley opened out, could be seen the chess-board of cultivated canefields, with Gordon Vale and its mill embosomed among them. Further still, a bit of Cairns, the Inlet and the blue sea, with a tiny speck or two on it, which

close investigation showed to be steamers entering or leaving the port.

The Range, steep as it is, is clothed from foot to summit with grass and timber. The ground is gravelly; the formation free granitic. There is plenty of water there, as elsewhere on the tableland. We shot a couple of scrub turkeys (*megapodii*) on our way home. Good enough eating but gamey, and one soon tires of them. They are about as big as a good-sized rooster. I'd never go after them with a shot-gun unless I was really hungry. When started off the ground the poor wretches just make for the handiest branch, and squat there. A shot-gun is plain murder, while a pea rifle will give them a sporting chance, for if you miss they are off a hundred yards or so to another branch, and one must want a change of diet pretty badly before one will force a way through prickly lawyer vines after him.

Just before we turned into Braun's a huge cassowary, with three chicks, stalked on to the track ahead. We stopped dead, and the beautiful bird then hesitatingly came towards us with her slow, dainty step, and we had a real good "dekko," as she turned her handsome blue and red head this way and that, eyeing us with eager curiosity. Terry then said "Boo!" and she was off like a shot. Not being "sports," not one of us had even dreamed of raising the gun at her.

Christmas Day was at hand—beautifully fine. Last one I had spent making up for Valparaiso before a howling Southerly; a tremendous sea was on, and it was freezing cold.

Len took me in to his parents' place to spend the day, and I was introduced to Dad, Mum, and a host of strapping brothers and sisters. Dad was a fine-looking, middle-aged man, tall and spare, with short, square-cut, sandy beard, thoughtful grey eyes, good-humoured smile, and spoke concisely and deliberately, laying emphasis on every other word, thus:—"Well, Mr. Senex, I am *delighted* to make your acquaintance.". He was a more or less self-educated, well read man, a most interesting companion and a keen debater, though rather prone to excitement in argument. Lastly, he was the most confirmed optimist I have ever met. Mum was a handsome Junoesque blonde, sharp of eye and tongue, distinctly the boss, and inclined to make the most of it. Rather cold and hard perhaps, but kind-hearted enough. They were very good to me in my early struggling days, and I was glad to accept their ungrudging hospitality.

Christmas Day passed with the usual accompaniment of pudding and other fairly solid comestibles, and I stopped there overnight, as a picnic had been arranged for next day to go and see the famous Lake Barrine. The day was bright and clear, and about twenty of us set out through the dense scrub along a fairly good road. After an hour or two's march we turned into a narrow pad, and presently saw a blue gleam through the trees. It was a steep descent, and the first effect of the sight of the lake was, queerly enough, that of looking right *up* at it. However, we were soon at the water's edge, and

I got my first view of the deep cobalt blue mere, lying calm and peaceful, embosomed in the dense scrub.

It is about a square mile in extent, very pretty, dangerous to bathe in if one is a poor swimmer, as the banks are steep and very deep (the water being six feet deep only eight feet from the bank). It is locally considered unfathomable, which probably means that a forty-fathom line would bottom it. Still one could get comfortably drowned there. I have heard enthusiasts compare these little lakes, Eacham, Barrine and Euramoo, to the Irish Killarney, which is a wild absurdity, though the lakes are pretty enough to be worth going to see. The three of them, about three miles apart, are perched on the very lip of the Range, 2500 feet above sea-level, and are the craters of extinct volcanoes. Barrine is blue, cheerful and bright; Eacham is green, cold and depressing, and one has a feeling as of some dreadful Thing just below the surface, waiting for one's foot to slip. Euramoo I haven't seen, though only a mile or two away, since the scrub is impenetrable. The blacks think these lakes "debil-debil," and won't go near them after sundown.

Our party boiled the billy, explored round a bit, played the usual picnic games, and had a dip in the enticingly cool water. I, who can't swim, in spite of my thirteen years at sea, cautiously kept within reach of the overhanging shrubs growing close to the water. Then, as the cows must be milked though the heavens fall, and those who had some to put through were beginning to

get restive, we packed up and wended our way home again, I going straight out to the barn to be in trim for work next day.

The next three weeks I worked at clearing a site for a house, planting panicum grass on the creek banks, and attending to the vegetables, which, with a few good rainy days, were looking well. The rainy season burst on us early in January, and for nearly a fortnight it poured in a steady, ceaseless torrent, drumming on the iron roof of the barn until one had almost to shout to be heard. By mid-January my grass was a foot high, pumpkins running all over the place, and I had about three thousand cabbages coming on well, which I thought to make money out of by and bye.

Terry and Len were timber-cutting on the former's place, in spite of the wet. When it got really too bad, we stayed in the barn, played crib, mended clothes, got axes and brush-hooks to a razor-like sharpness, and so on. One thing about the wet weather was that it was warm, and it didn't matter how soaked you got, so long as you wore the universal short-sleeved grey flannel, and changed at once on coming home. You could work then in the wet all day without ill-effect.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CYCLONE.

THE cyclone was heralded by a week of stifling hot weather. As a general rule it isn't hot up here, the thermometer rarely climbing to 90 deg., and then only on an odd day in November; but that week was awful. From being unable to work, it got to be an effort to move. The nights too were hot, a most unusual circumstance. Every day the sky would bank up with heavy, hard-edged clouds, leaving just an inverted saucer of smoky blue at the zenith, through which the sun appeared at noon, strong enough to throw a shadow, but not bright enough to make your eyes water looking at him. The birds, after their morning carol, were silent, and by noon each day the stillness was weird. Nature seemed to be waiting for something; there was not even a breath of wind to stir the lifeless trees. We got to have a feeling that we ought to talk in whispers, a creepy sensation—almost of fear. Occasionally there was a faint far-off air-tremor, rather than sound, of thunder. On the fifth day Len, Terry and I were lying about the barn, too languid to move, when, about noon, there was a sudden change. It got quickly cold and the sky

to the South-East banked up, tier upon tier, with blue-black clouds. The zenith was covered, and the clouds commenced rushing across it, rapidly whirling and dissolving as they went, in rather an awe-inspiring fashion.

"It's coming, blokes, whatever it is," said Terry quietly.

On the word, like a bucket suddenly tipped over us, a deafening roar of rain on the roof, ceasing in two minutes as suddenly as it came, and dying hissing away up the paddock. Silence again. Then, in the distance, a sound like a slowly-expelled breath, only continuous, and rapidly getting louder as it drew nearer. A few minutes later, and with a rush and a roar, wind and rain were on us. There was not much force in the wind—just about half a gale—but it was its sudden shock that was rather startling. Wind about S.E., and a good deal of thunder and lightning, which gave us the idea at first that it was only a heavy thunderstorm. It kept the same force pretty well until 5 p.m., when it shifted to South, and commenced to show us what it really could do. Crash after crash from the scrub near-by showed how the wind was testing the trees.

Just at this time two swaggies, who had come up the Range, banged at the door. We let them in, soaked and shivering, nearly in a state of collapse with long exposure to the driving rain. We gave them hot tea and dry togs, and while they were getting warm again we, nearly naked (so as not to wet any clothes!), went outside and

gathered a big pile of firewood, to keep a roaring blaze going all night.

By half-past six it was blowing a heavy gale, and the old barn was creaking and straining like a ship at sea. We put a big back log on the fire, piled her up to keep going all night, and were just going to turn in, when there was a hammering on the door, which we had well secured against its being blown in. We fell over each other scrambling to see who the devil it was, and discovered two neighbouring bachelor selectors, who had been camped in a tent pitched inside a rough shed half a mile away. A dead tree had come down fair across their camp with They just pulled themselves out of the wreckage, the two of them in it—a miracle of an escape. and, with their lives in their hands, crossed through the scrub in the dark to Braun's. They didn't seem to think anything of it—sort of "all in the day's work" idea. It was nine o'clock by the time they had finished tea, and the hurricane was going full bore.

The hoarse roar of the wind drowned every other sound. A huge dead elm came down just astern of the barn, missing the end by about four feet, and we never heard it; indeed, we never knew anything about it till morning. The rain was driving in fine spray, wetting everything, so we rigged the swaggies' "fly," and the seven of us crowded under it like sardines in a tin, managing to keep just about damp.

None of us slept though, being too much concerned about the possibility of the barn coming

about our ears. However, it weathered the gale triumphantly. At midnight, in a furious squall, the wind veered to S.W., and the door got the full force of it. It gave, the top hinge went, and inside she came on top of us. Away went the tent, split in half, and in about two ups we and everything we possessed were soaked through. It took the lot of us about ten minutes to re-secure the door, and we spent the rest of the night huddled round the fire, the furious back draught blowing smoke and flame in all directions.

About 3.30 a.m. the wind shifted again to about W.N.W. and blew harder than ever. The barn swayed perceptibly, but the corner posts were three feet in the ground, and went solid up to the roof, and that saved us.

It was daylight now, and we could see the clearing. What a difference! It looked as if a titanic steam-roller had been all over it: weeds, dead trees, bushes, all levelled flat. We, who a few hours ago had to part the bushes to get in the door almost, now had a clear view of the whole clearing. It would have cost Braun pretty well £50 to do the work the wind did gratis for him that night in his clearing.

At about 7 a.m. there was a lull, and shortly after it became clear that the storm's back was broken, the unbroken grey pall of sky commencing to break up into clouds and scud. The wind slowly veered to N.N.W., lessening in force all the time, but kept at hard gale till after midnight, when it died down rapidly, and by 3 a.m. it was calm, sky clear, and stars shining brightly.

While the gale was on I slipped down to see the creek, and found the little brawling stream transformed into a raging torrent twenty feet deep. Even while I looked, the bank higher up gave way, and for a hundred feet or so slid roaring into the current.

After the weather cleared up I went across to my own clearing, to find numberless little water-courses all over the place, and the grass! well—you could fairly hear it growing. In a week (say, five weeks after sowing), it was good enough to have turned stock on to, had I possessed any.

I went in towards the line, thinking to get a job clearing wreckage somewhere, but there were too many willing volunteers already at it. Most of the roads were blocked by falling timber, and everybody had suffered more or less, either by loss of stock, or through having their buildings unroofed.

I took the opportunity, while in town, to interview the local storekeeper with a view to credit, which he willingly granted on explaining my position. The country storekeeper! Go where you will, one of the principal topics of conversation is sure to be the iniquities of the local storekeeper. But we couldn't do without him. By extending a liberal credit he enables one to stay on the farm until one's footing is secure, and if his prices are a bit stiff, it ought to be remembered how many bad debts he contracts, and what

a risky thing it is to give credit to a comparatively unknown man. If it be true that the farmer is the country's backbone, it is equally true that the storekeeper is the one who stiffens that backbone till it can stay erect of itself, and often prevents it from breaking. I know. I'm one of the vertebræ, and I'd often have been dislocated but for old "Stores."

CHAPTER XIV.

EFFECTING IMPROVEMENTS.

AFTER the satisfactory interview with the store-keeper I tramped out home with a light heart. I wouldn't starve for a month or two, anyhow, and now the first thing to be done was to erect a house. I had fourteen ten-foot sheets of iron, and though some of them were a bit battered owing to an irresponsible bloke thrashing out seed on them while I was away, still they were good enough for an eighteen-by-twelve humpy. The building was to be of rough-split bush timber, I chose red oak for the purpose, mainly because I didn't know of any of the other good splitters, like silky oak, young maple, or ash. With a crosscut I cut the tree up into three-foot lengths; then, with a maul, wedges and axe, split these up into a species of short weatherboards.

My two mates being now away on holiday, there was nobody to show me how to start right, so of course I met endless difficulties, which made the work back-breaking. An experienced

“bushey” would have had all the required timber split in about four days. It took me exactly three weeks.

Then came the erection. Four corner posts, which I would have three feet in the ground, and going right up to the roof, for stability in case of cyclones, of the hardest timber I could find, which was also the heaviest, as I thought it would be the most likely to last in the ground. As a matter of fact, these rot quickest. The four posts weighed about five hundredweight each, and I had to “fleet jig” them with block and tackle over the log-strewn paddock up to the site, and then erect a derrick to get them into their places. It was interesting enough, but Lord! how slow.

Then wall plates and ground plates—the former one end at a time with the tackle; then lash that end while I tackled the other end up and nailed it. “Dinkum yakker” all right, and about three-parts of it not necessary, if I’d only known. I think “Senex’s house” was the topic of amused conversation all over the district for months after.

The studs were saplings on which I left the bark, thus making a fine harbourage for all sorts of biting, stinging and stinking vermin. On to these went the slabs, weatherboard fashion. Then the roof, with a nail in every corrugation, in the concaves instead of the convexes, and the mansion wanted but a floor. I got a bloke to buy me some second-class boards from a mill on the line, and bring them out to me. The cartage came to

ten shillings more than the price of the timber, but, as he had to wait nine months for me to pay him, he deserved it.

Next, I put in a fireplace with the roof of it at the wrong angle, so that the smoke came pouring into the main room all the time the fire was going. Finally, I set the guinea stamp of aristocracy on the mansion by inserting a cracked glass window. It was raining nearly all the time I was building. I had spilt a gallon billy of boiling water over my feet through the handle coming adrift, and, to add to the difficulties, I had to hump the floor boards about a mile through the mud, fallen timber preventing the cart getting right out. Anyhow, it was finished at last.

I felt so proud the first night I camped in it that I couldn't sleep, and got up several times to walk round and admire the shanty in the moonlight. On one of these peregrinations (I clad in an airy costume of a single shirt), I suddenly felt something cold and wriggley under my foot. I must have jumped about fifteen feet. Turning round, I saw a black snake squirming about. I must have stepped on his neck. Otherwise, I don't know how I escaped a bite. I got a stick and finished the little devil. Nobody seems to pay much attention to black snakes up here. They always whip out of the way, and don't attack unless actually interfered with, and they're easily killed with a light stick.

About this time I got a small brushing job from a mean person who gave me ten shillings an acre

to cut four acres thickly grown with the accursed stinging tree. I found afterwards that thirty shillings an acre is little enough for tackling this dreadful stuff. However, I got it done, and was laid up for a week in consequence. No sleep through the pain, and blood coming from nose and ears while working in it. There must be a frightfully deadly poison in the plant. The bare inhalation of the smell of the fresh-cut stalks makes you vomit, and brings blood from the nose in a few minutes, while the least touch on any part by the bush causes agonising pain, which lasts for weeks sometimes. There is no palliative.

I then got a job from a neighbouring selector to brush twenty acres, so I shouldered "Matilda" and went to camp with him. It's the devil's own job "Matilda-ing" in the Rainy Season. The tracks are knee deep in mud, and the paddocks, what with logs and interlaced seed stems on the grass, are nearly impassable. I don't know of anything so tiring as trying to wade through a *paspalum* paddock in seed. I anticipated being a month or so with this chap, Barker. He was a bachelor, young, fair-haired, rather shifty blue-grey eyes, a quick and uncertain temper, and as sarcastic as the devil. Although twenty-four, he was practically illiterate, owing to having had to milk cows from about six years of age, there being therefore no time for schooling. As is always the case, this misfortune had bred in him

a suspicion of anyone educated, and a disposition to try and take him down a peg, to show that he was as smart as the other, in spite of lack of education. This sort of thing is inevitable.

I must give him his due though—he had “made good.” He cleared out from the cow-slavery when he was fifteen years old and started for himself; told a fib about his age, got a selection, and felled most of the scrub himself. When twenty-one he sold out for £800, and took a partly improved place further out, going in for fattening “beefers.” A dry spell nearly ruined the game youngster, so, sickening of the South, he sold out, came up with a wad, got a block here, and started in to fall all the scrub as before. He had about a fifteen-acre paddock with a house on it when I made his acquaintance. His place is worth £1000 easily now.

His mate was an Irish-Tasmanian named Paddy (of course); middle-aged, tall, lank and dark, with a long melancholy face like a cow, and very weather-beaten. Quite uneducated, but an absolute glutton for work, and with a very decided weakness for beer—lots of it for choice. He was an artist with the axe, putting a scarf in a tree as neat as a saw cut. Good-tempered, he had a quiet humour that floored Snappy Barker every time, as thus:—

Barker: “Hey, Paddy! I was down at Blogg’s yes’day, and they was runnin’ yer down summat crool.”

Paddy: "Was they? Well, why dinyer stop 'em? Yer could, easy."

Barker: "'Ow could I?"

Paddy: "Oh! Don't you start runnin' me down to 'em. Then they won't git startit."

The three of us were to tucker together, and as they had ordered a big stock, which had been left at a house three miles off, the first job we did was to hump the stuff out. It was raining hard—as it did almost every day of the six weeks I was with them. We had an old pack-horse. My road was bad enough, Lord knows; but Barker's was literally waist deep in mud in places, covered with a repulsive green slime and bubbling with foul-smelling gas when disturbed. There was a whole cask of salt beef among other things, and this was the first thing we tackled. We emptied the meat into corn sacks, and loaded the old horse and Paddy with that, while Barker and I slung the cask, with about five gallons of salt pickle in it, on a pole between us, and started out home. We struggled up the first slippery hill.

"Blow this," said Barker. "We'll lighten up."

We emptied out part of the pickle, and proceeded. After we had ploughed along a mile or so, I said "Blast the stuff!" so we emptied out some more. A little further, and we mutually damned it, and jettisoned the whole cargo, finding even the empty cask all too heavy on that dreadful road. It took us the next two days to get the balance of the stuff out. We got sick of unloading the old nag, hauling him out of the bog, and loading him up again.

It would have been an enlightening sight for the city "go-on-the-land-young-man" person to have seen us slowly crawling along between the gloomy walls of scrub, squash! squelch! splash! covered with mud and sweating with the heat, Paddy ahead with two bags of tinned stuff, Barker next with two fifties of flour slung by straps over his shoulders, I last with two dozen of jam in my shirt, and a seventy of sugar across my neck, with sacking round it to keep it a bit dry. By cripes! It made us appreciate Barker's dry snug little crib, really beautifully built of split-out stuff, roof and all. It was quite waterproof.

I would have quite enjoyed living there, if only it hadn't been for Barker's infernal tongue. He soon found I didn't take very much rousing up, so of course it was a great joke to "gittim wild." With this end in view, he assumed a particularly galling habit of patronisingly referring to me as "Me good mahn," or more often "Me good little mahn." I think he must have spent his hours devising ridiculous names, and springing them on us at night. Paddy suffered in silence under "Me little gohanna;" his dog, with a sort of Zulu touch, was dubbed "Little-snake-with-the-teeth-so-sharp-and-big;" while I was driven to a state bordering on homicidal mania by a week of "Me little axe-handle breaker," because I fractured the handle of the dodderly firewood axe—already badly sprung and wobbling—which he had sworn should last the year out.

The more we expostulated, the worse he got. He

had a pair of cats ("Curse-guts" and "Stinker"), of whom he was so fond that he took them to bed with him at night, and then blamed me for bringing fleas to the camp, after a night spent in scratching himself. With as much sense of music as a cow, he used to drone out all day the one song he knew in a dismal monotone. It was a doleful ditty; something about "Why did they sell Killarney?"

He was very superstitious, and I'm ashamed to say that I once or twice got my own back on him through this weakness—but only when very wild.

I made him lose a night's sleep once through suddenly jumping out of bunk, opening the door, slamming it to again, and then turning wild-eyed to Barker, whispering: "It's there again, Jack!" He was keen on his garden, and he and Paddy had about a dozen different kinds of vegetables growing, with bananas and pineapples to beat the band. When the latter were ripening we had to light big fires to keep the flying foxes off, and it gave one a creepy feeling to lie round one of the fires before turning in, swapping yarns, and watching the countless myriads of bat things stream steadily across the sky in an unbroken cloud by the hour together. (Note for orchardists: These pests don't alight anywhere near a decent blaze.)

I finished my contract with Barker by the end

of May, and got enough out of it to renew my credit with the storekeeper, and pay the £3 inspection fee for survey of improvements, prior to borrowing from the Agricultural Bank, so that I could go on falling on my own place. I applied for £120, to fall sixty acres; the loan was granted. Payment by instalments as work proceeded, and terms twenty-one years at five per cent. interest. Getting my old friend Len Vincent to help me, I re-started on my own place early in June.

CHAPTER XV.

MORE IMPROVEMENTS—BULLOCKYS.

THE weather had fined up and remained so for months. Beautiful warm sun, tempered by the cool breeze by day, and cold, sometimes frosty, nights. It was ideal weather for work; and Len and I worked well, ate well, slept well, and for the first time I started to throw off the effects of all that worry and nerve-strain I had undergone at sea.

Those glorious days! We would be off just after daybreak, red-nosed and shivering, clad in thick garments and heavy coats, with perhaps a frost on the grass. Ten minutes with the axe and off came the coat. Another ten, and the extra pair of pants followed suit, and by half-past eight the benignant sunshine reduced one to pants and shirt. How you could work! and when lunch-time came, eat!! It was good to be alive, life was rosy, and every lungful of the glorious crisp bush-scented air put fresh manhood into us.

Then the still more enchanting moonlit nights. Small print could be read with ease by the moonlight, and with the air so still the howl of a lonely dog three miles off came clear and distinct. From

the hut we could see mile on mile of rolling scrub, sombre and still, and in the distance a long line of scrub-clad hills, clear cut against the star-strewn, ink-blue sky. The spirit of the romance of pioneering took possession of us. We were the only inhabitants of a new-found beautiful world; we were shipwrecked on an unspoiled pre-Adamite island; we were, well—just a couple of enthusiastic bush-lovers, with some ability to appreciate the beauty of old mother Nature.

Len was a good mate, and time passed on winged feet. On Sundays we tramped in for tucker and spent best part of the day at the open house his hospitable parents kept. We had whips of vegetables from my garden, until Braun in an unlucky hour gave Ellison permission to turn a few cows into his paddock. Now my cabbage garden was down on the creek at a place where several big trees had come down, the spaces between being filled up with smaller timber. This formed a barrier that I thought no mortal cow could ever get over. I didn't know cows.

At 8 p.m. one night three thousand beautiful cabbages and about a quarter of an acre of other green stuff formed a patch of cultivation to gladden the eye. At 7 a.m. next day I, newly-arisen, came to the door of the hut just in time to see the last of a line of ten dropsical, bloated cows see-saw over the impregnable logs out of a trampled muddy waste that had been a garden. I rushed down. Too late by hours. Absolutely nothing remained, save a few mangled stalks. Oh! my cabbages! that were to have paid the storekeeper's

bill, rent, rates, and left a few pounds in hand. Gone! all gone! With murder in my heart and profanity on my lips, I chased the horrible wretches, who, grunting with distension and, I fondly hope, suffering pangs of indigestion, could hardly get up a slow trot. The tangled grass tripped me up, and I could only stand swearing impotently, and throw a few futile sticks at the brutes waddling heavily across the creek, where they lined up on the opposite bank, turned round and grinned—*grinned* at me. Ever see a cow grin? Wait till they manage to crawl into your cultivation patch, or land a hefty kick home when you're putting the leg-rope on, and then you'll find out. I know now why the conventional devil has horns and hoofs. The monks of old who first pictured him kept cows. That's why.

I swore at them until my breath failed, while the light breeze gently waved the frosted grass against my bare legs and turned my nose blue, then scurried back to the house. Len laughed unfeelingly, told me to put a secure fence up, and grow some more. He gave me a hand with the fence on Sunday. We always put off play-time jobs like that till Sunday.

Terry O'Gorman had come back to his place by this time, doing a bit more falling, and it was quite like old times again, for, of course, the three of us camped together. Terry was great on springboard work. A springboard is a six-inch by one-inch board four feet long, with a horse-shoe bolted on one end point up. You cut a notch two inches deep in a tree, insert the board, and

stand on it to chop, the point of the shoe being driven by your weight into the upper edge of the notch and holding firm. Terry would go up three "lifts" (twelve to fifteen feet) without nervousness. The advantage is that the higher you go the easier it is to chop, the grain of the wood being straighter. When the tree goes, you scuttle away as best you can. I have heard it described as chopping with one foot in the grave and other on a bit of orange peel; but it's not quite that bad.

About a month after we commenced falling I actually got a "divvy" out of my place. A local bullocky had an order for "some small Kauri pine," and some on my block were the handiest, so I got £5 for about 12,000 super feet (worth over £200 in Sydney, I suppose), and I thought myself lucky to get that.

Pardy, the bullocky, was a big, rough, dark-complexioned bloke, with a shambling walk, a rough tongue and a heavy hand. He absolutely didn't care a damn for anybody or anything. The only way we could get the timber out was across a steep gully with a little muddy ditch at the bottom. It was hard work for the bullocks to come up dragging the empty jinker, but going down! Pardy would snig his log to the brow, then—whish! The whip sent skin and hair flying, and the poor brutes took the descent at a canter, the log behind skidding from side to side, while Pardy would stand on the brink cracking that awful whip, yelling, "Go it! you —— sons of ——! Head over turkey; I thot she wud," as they

brought up all standing in the little creek, bullocks in an untidy mob, log broadside on, and the polers down. How on earth he didn't kill half his team every time, I don't know. The place is known as "Pardy's jump-up" to this day.

All sorts and conditions of bullockys! There was Pardy, sweating and swearing, and knocking his cattle to pieces, without enough breath left at night to cool his tea with, and yet not doing nearly as much as his rival Robin Hood, who, with a team of young steers and cunning old "stags" only, would haul a 20 per cent. bigger load to the railway an hour quicker than Pardy; never raising his voice; just talking quietly to his beasts, and never more than flicking the whip at them. He had their confidence! A striking example of what kindness and patience will do.

Jack Bayton was another one. He had a team of magnificent animals that could pull the guts out of any other on the road. He could haul some astonishing loads, but used to let the brutes just dodge along, while he admonished them with loving profanity. "Baldy! Baldy!! You ——! I'll teach y' ter go pokin' inter the scrub!" (Baldy was after shade and a spell.) Flick! would come the whip without force enough to kill a fly, and Baldy lazily resumed the track. Or perhaps Spot would stop and reach for a bunch of Commonwealth weed. "Ha! you Spot! —— you, ye blanky ol' ——! I'll —— well teach yer about wastin' time eatin' weeds." Spot looks

back with a sleepy eye, shoves out, gets his weed, and walks on calmly chewing. A fat lot he cares about Jack, who affectionately apostrophises him. "Luk a' that now! Jevver see sich an ol' ——! Cunnin' as a —— —— rat, so he is." Jack thought the world of his team, and cripes! they could pull when they let themselves out. It was a treat to see his plodding team swaying up a long hill, without a pause, with 2500 of bulloak, perhaps, aboard. Very few would do it.

Tom Faringdon was another type again. Big, black, hairy as Esau, a bloodshot eye, bristly beard and a frightful temper. Doesn't take long for that sort of man to upset a team. Let his waggon get stuck, and then watch the circus. What ho! A frightful stream of language. Still stuck. Then the whip, till the fall was sticky with blood; then frantic rushes fore and aft alongside the team, digging into their ribs with the butt of the whip. His voice would be nearly gone by this time, and, with his Mephistophelian face and glaring eyes, he looked a perfect fiend. Next he uses the whip handle—smash! smash! smash! along the unfortunate shivering line, who, lowing with fright, don't know what to do. The handle breaks across a bullock's back. A frantic howl; down goes his hat, and he dances it madly into the mud, while his hands (like old "Dad Rudd's" when the horses went down the well) are raised, but not in prayer, to Heaven. Then, extremes meeting, he gets so mad that he becomes calm, and so finally gets the team clear—to repeat

the whole process another half-dozen times before he reaches the station yard.

Well, good or bad, your slow, plodding bullocky is the true pioneer. Always first in the field, following the fresh cut tracks after timber in country that perhaps years after will be thrown open for selection—and his old tracks made the future main roads of the district. He has a rough, lonely life. Works hard, lives hard, ay! and sometimes has to die hard too. Collectively, a brave, hardy and useful member of the mighty Brotherhood of Labour.

Len and I went on chopping, the days passing pleasantly, the work interesting. Occasionally we attended a dance at the school house on Saturday nights (of which more hereafter), which was the only break. We had about thirty-five acres down, and then came——

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ACCIDENT.

THE August day was bright and fine, but very gusty.

"Don't like the looks of it at all," said Len, after breakfast. "Too windy to be safe."

"Think we'd better stop home?" I hazarded.

"M—m! Can't spare the time," he demurred. "Got our work cut out to finish in good time for the burn, you know, so guess we'll chance it."

"Righto!" I answered. So 7.30 a.m. saw us at it as usual. I was on a "mad" patch—trees leaning every way—on the side of a hill. I had sent several drives up; then had to go among the fallen stuff to send the last four trees of that patch down hill. The last one of these four was a long willowy crowfoot elm, and as he had a bit of a lean uphill I "nicked" him well, to make sure he'd go; scarfed the others, and then started on the driving tree. It was blowing fresh and I was a bit nervous. I hurriedly got the belly cut in, and had the back in near enough to make him start talking (i.e., cracking a bit), when a strong gust came along, making the trees sway dangerously. I stood a second or two undecided whether to go or stay, and "he who hesitates is

lost." A sharp crack! and the long crowfoot broke back over the scarf, automatically becoming the driver, and sending the whole lot down on top of me. "Oh, Christ!" I panted, and made a jump for safety. A stumble, a slip, and I was down. Up again, and, with the whistling rush of the falling trees loud in my ears, I turned to face and, if possible, dodge them, as the fallen stuff round prevented my jumping aside. The first trunk missed, but tore the shirt off my arm as it swept to earth, throwing me off my balance; then a whirling stick split my head open, sent me down on my face, and next second I was buried in falling limbs. Whack! whack! whack!

I suppose the whole business was only a matter of seconds, but to me it seemed like an eternity. Half-stunned with fright and the bursting crash of breaking branches, with the breath beaten out of my body, I thought at each fresh thump: "This has done it! N-no, not quite yet." Then a sudden silence and a slowly dawning realisation. "Why! I'm not dead!"

I lay a second or two gathering my scattered wits; then slowly raised by head, which sang like a kettle. I was in a sort of rustic grotto of green stuff piled six feet over me. Lord knows how I escaped being killed. Then I set to work to overhaul myself. Didn't feel the least pain. Good! But hallo! What's the matter with my left arm? There should be no joints between elbow and wrist, and here's at least two. I felt an insane desire to laugh as I waggled the injured member about, with the blood running down my

face from my cut head. Both bones were broken twice, and the wrist as well, but that seemed to be all; so, under the circumstances, I had got off fairly easy. I crawled out with some difficulty, lay down, and coo-eed for Len.

There's something about the call of a hurt man that can't be mistaken, and Len dropped his axe and raced for me at the first sound of my voice. Again I felt the hysterical desire to laugh at the sight of him tumbling, scrambling, tripping over the jumble of fallen stuff in his eagerness to get to me. He rushed up. I must have looked rather startling—pale and blood-stained, and the shirt half-torn off me.

"My God! Charlie! What's happened?"

"All right, Len," I answered. "Ain't going to snuff it yet; but my arm's broke, and I feel awful sick."

"Well, tell us what to do, ol' chap," he said, fluttering round like a distressed hen. "I feel as useless as the fifth wheel of a coach; but tell us what to do, and I'll do it."

He got a bit of a stick, and we bound the arm to it with the remnants of my shirt. Then, with his assistance, I crawled painfully over the fallen stuff, down and up the steep banks of a creek, and so to the hut. Didn't feel any pain, only a dreadul sick, vomity sensation. I lay down a bit while Len brewed a strong mug of tea; swallowed that; felt a heap better; dragged on my Sunday-go-to-meetings, and prepared for the tramp into hospital. My back was bruised to a jelly nearly, but I didn't feel it. A real injury

seems to be its own anaesthetic somehow. We left the humpy about ten o'clock on the ten-mile journey to the station, I cheerfully ruminating en route on this being the end of everything. I wonder how many times since then I've had the same thought: "Oh, Lord! this set-back really is the end." Oh, well! It's all in the day's work.

We tramped in. Nobody had a buckboard in those days, and I couldn't ride a horse. We got to the station about half-past three, and had to wait for the lengthsmen to finish a job they were at before taking me in on the pump-car, meanwhile telephoning for the ambulance to meet me at the next station. I sat down, and, for the first and only time in my life, fainted.

Finally I got into Atherton Hospital, sick and shaky, about 6 p.m., and didn't I suffer that night! My arm ached, my head ached, the left shoulder was hurt somehow and also ached, and my back was one huge ache.

I got over it all right, though my arm was very weak for two years after. What with one thing and another I was in hospital six weeks, and if it hadn't been for worrying over the selection would rather have enjoyed the holiday. The cheerful nurses called me "Skipper" (every patient had a nickname), and were rather inclined to "pet" me. Take it all round, I had rather a fine time.

I needn't have worried either, for several of the blokes out there left their own pressing work and bogged into my scrub, doing it under regulation price, so that I wouldn't have to find any

cash over what the bank had advanced. I don't know about the towns, but in the Bush you'll always find them willing to help a lame dog over a stile like that. You've only got to be sick to find out how some, perhaps intolerably bad tempered, hitherto unfriendly neighbour will turn-to and do his bit for you with a will. You don't find that sort of spirit much at 'Ome in the Old Dart.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOCIAL AMENITIES.

ATHERTON Hospital was a very good country hospital in those days. Now, what with added buildings, increased staff, X-ray plant, and so forth, it can hold its head up with a metropolitan institution. It wants to be good, too, in a rising place like the Tableland, where there are so many accidents in the bush. I was glad of the change, but my heart being in the scrub, I welcomed the day when the doctor said I could go back. I was just in time to see the last trees of my falling go down. The bank paid me, I settled all outstanding accounts, including storekeeper's bill for seven months, and had about £5 left. Couldn't do any heavy work, but got the promise of a wardsman's job at the hospital for the following January, which, being fairly light toil, I thought I could tackle.

Meanwhile I put in the time reaping seed in O'Gorman's, to sow my falling when it was burnt. Len's twenty-first birthday happened, and his hospitable parents gave a big party to celebrate it. Everybody was invited, and came as soon as possible after evening milking, and what with dancing, singing and a splendid supper the even-

ing was a great success. I made the first speech of my life on this occasion, congratulating Len, and presented an admirable picture of stuttering nervousness. "Steele Rudd's" selection stories are somewhat apt to give the impression that bush folk mostly attend such "do's" in rough boots and patched clothes. Practically all the settlers here started like myself, with nothing to speak of, and all were still in the struggling stage; but there wasn't a bloke among them who didn't have a good suit carefully packed away for such occasions, no matter how badly off he was. Same with the girls. All had tasteful frocks, neat blouses and good shoes; and the bright eyes, rosy cheeks and superabundant energy, which is imparted by this glorious climate (in which, according to certain interested persons, the white man can't live), with the laughter and chatter of happy young people, make a cheerful scene, good to look at.

On such occasions, usually held at the school-house, Mrs. Bloggs and Mrs. Jimson, who haven't been playing speaks on account of "things I 'eard you'd bin sayin' about me," bury the hatchet, and unite in condemning the tale-bearing party. Roberts forgets that Robinson's bull broke the fence, got into his cultivation, and that he had to repair the fence himself. All is peace and friendly feeling. Everyone is bent on casting care to the winds and enjoying himself or herself—for that one evening, anyway.

Music, more or less sweet, is discoursed by an accordeon. The M.C., who usually takes his

duties very seriously, bellows his orders at intervals. Perhaps it is "S'lect y'r pa-ardners f'r a walce." Then is Bill seen slouching shamefacedly up to Ethel or Maude, "'Ow erbout gittin' up with us f'r this one?" Maude giggles, squirms, and finally says, "Oh, all right." They go through the dance amid a fire of such witticisms as, "'Ello, Bill, when's it comin' orf?" or, "Nar then, Mord, I'll tell y'r mar!" Bill, not a very brilliant controversialist, contents himself with, "Ah! garn!" while Maude, with high disdain, answers, "D'y' think I'd 'ave him? Pooh!" So poor Bill feels sat on.

Now and then you see big men like Pardy bending nearly double, painfully "treading the mazy" with bits of kids of twelve or thereabout, as there are often not ladies enough to go round. Now and again the chatter of voices is stilled and we hear, "Mr. Ransome will oblige the comp'ny with a song." Mr. Ransome forthwith proceeds to oblige, in a voice hoarse from long and fervent swearing at refractory bullocks, and is inclined to crack on the high notes. He gives us "Eileen Alannah." Later on, Mr. Furney also obliges. He is short and spare, and, to the great astonishment of his audience, renders "Let me like a soldier fall," in a roaring basso that makes the roof rattle.

As eleven o'clock strikes certain of us slide off, collect sticks, build a fire, and suspend a kerosene tin of water over the blaze. When that is boiled there is a general yell of "Supper," and hampers, which the ladies have generously pro-

vided, are opened, and their hidden wealth of sandwiches and cake revealed. The community have by general levy long ago accumulated a large stock of crockery, specially for such ceremonies at the present. The catering is all arranged beforehand. Mrs. A. brings tea, sugar and milk. Mrs. B. some sandwiches, and so on. There is always more than the company can assimilate, and this surplus it is the custom to divide among any far-out bachelors who may be present—a gift most acceptable, as I know from experience.

One notices that the gentlemen, no matter how rough in their work-a-day world, are naturally chivalrous, and take care to see every lady provided for before commencing to imbibe tea themselves.

It is midnight now, and those who have plenty of cows, and little assistance, slide off home. The others resume dancing with more vigour than ever. Mr. Daney obliges with several songs. He is a bit of a dandy, got up to kill in a chocolate-coloured suit, dark blue waistcoat and cerise tie. He has rather a pimply face, a perpetual grin and damp-looking, wispy, straw-coloured hair. He is nervous and continuously wipes his hands on a handkerchief held for the purpose. He is a fair tenor, much inclined to tremolo. His first number, "To a manshun in the cit-e-e-e," etc., is received with much applause, which moves him to a second effort, "Please, Mr. Conductor, don-putmeyoff the ter-rain," which is also taken kindly. Rubbing his hands harder than ever, he comes up to us, a broad smile on his rather weak face,

"Ah! I'm makin' myself popular, ain't I?" Poor "Algy's" songs always run to sugary sentiment, so of course, "Don't go down in the mine, daddy," is his closing piece. Give him his due though, he could work; but, being easily bamboozled, it was usually for someone else, with little profit to himself. He was also an excellent hand among the cows.

About 3 a.m. the party breaks up, and you see the hurricane lamps, like dancing fireflies, disappearing in the scrub, many of the people to go right on milking as soon as their glad rags are off, and get a few hours' sleep after breakfast.

Another time, perhaps at the annual break-up of the school just before Christmas, all hands assemble at the school house for a picnic. The school reserve is like a miniature saddling paddock at race time. The ladies are all there, clad in their best; scores of happy, laughing kiddies romping round, also toggled up, and the men folk in soberer hues, but all in their best. All forget their worries and try to pretend they are children again; and the onlooker smiles at the sight of bearded men and stout ladies playing "Jolly Miller," "Puss-in-the-corner," and so on, until he finds the infectious spirit of the day seize him, and he too joins in.

The schoolmaster presently puts the children through their paces under the parents' eagle eyes, and prizes are distributed—not without some murmurs and vague insinuations of favouritism from the mothers of the unsuccessful. Plenty of cash having been collected by weeks of busy can-

vassing, the winners obtain substantial rewards at running, jumping, climbing, etc. The ladies, as usual, provide the more solid portion of the bountiful spread, but there are always plenty of lollies, fruit and aerated waters besides.

Usually a bloke with a camera happens along some time in the afternoon, and then for a few minutes everyone loses his or her individuality, and combines in one hideous smirk with the conventional idea of looking pleasant. The long warm day draws to a close, and the kids, tired out, start off home, some to early bed, others to change hurriedly into muddy duds and milk cows. The milking is rushed through this evening, and the elders re-congregate at the school for a dance, which lasts until the "wee sma' hours ayont the twal!"

It all sounds simple enough in the telling, but go and live in the Bush a short time, and then see how you will enjoy these unceremonious little reunions; and contrast that feeling with the blasé indifference with which, when living in town, you attended a theatre or some other entertainment. Towns? Not on your life! Give me the great, quiet, hospitable Bush. The life is more natural, less strained—more human.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BURNING OFF.

It was time to burn-off. Since Braun's paddock would inevitably go when I fired, Braun himself, with philosophic acceptance of the fact, had dismantled the old barn and told me to go ahead. However, he had rented his paddock to old Pardy for a few months, and that nuisance had his bullocks there.

Like a damned ass, I went to give him notice that I intended to burn. Cripes! Wasn't there a storm! "—— ——— it!! You burn, and see what I'll do. Only bit of (sanguinary) grass I can get in the (luridly fiery improper) district, and now —— ———!!!"

I reminded him of the possibility that rain might come any day, and the Rainy Season was due to burst on us in a fortnight. No use. The old cow wouldn't hear of any compromise. If I burnt he'd blanky well burn *me*. "Selfish old rotter!" I muttered, and retired in dudgeon. I, of course, wasn't selfish. I went to see old Paddy, and took him and Barker into my confidence.

"Yer a fool," said Paddy. "If yer don't fire now, yer'll lose yer charnst, and then yer'll be ——'d (ruined). Fat lot Pardy'll care ef y'are!"

'E's only got a few bullocks, and they won't starve. Whips o' grass on th' road, and ef y' don't git y'r burn, y'll be like Barney's bull. Don't say nothin'. Just burn." Sensible advice.

Then Barker: "Well, me little frogs whisker" (I winced), "if I was you, I'd burn, and if thar-role snake's ears" (I writhed) "ses owt, just scruff 'im." Not so good, this, I thought, seeing that Pardy weighed fifteen stone, and I nine and a half.

However, in spite of their opinion, I pusillanimously decided to hold off for a fortnight, and then fire without notice. They agreed to come and help me, but opined they wouldn't be wanted, as it would be raining before then. A week went by with only a light thunderstorm; then the sky commenced banking up every night, to the southward. On the tenth day the bank came up to the zenith, with mutterings of thunder in the distance. Off I went to Barker's camp, and got there sweating.

"Come on, blokes; I'm burnin' to-morrow. Blast Pardy. We'll burn the grass round the hut to-night."

"Too late, I'm feared," said Paddy, looking at the sky. "But we'll come, anyhow. Got 'ny tucker?"

"Whips," I answered; "just fetch your blankets."

We went back on the run, reaching my place at dusk, and, arming ourselves with green bushes, fired the grass round the humpy. The sun being off it, it went slowly, and was easily kept within

bounds. In an hour we had the hut standing safely in a burnt patch of about a couple of acres. Then tea and bunk. But there was no sleep for me. The sky remained overcast, and the wind cold. I was in and out like a jack-in-the-box all night. About 2 a.m. there was a few minutes' slight drizzle, and my heart sank. At first streak of dawn ("sparrow-crack," in the vernacular) we were out, choked down some breakfast, then crossed into Braun's and drove Pardy's bullocks into a timber track in the scrub, cooping them up safely with a few bits of barb wire across the entrance. The morning was misty.

"Um!" said old Paddy. "Might be fine after all. That mizzle las' night won' 'urt. Wasn' 'nough ter but damp the top stuff; 'n if the sun comes out bright and 'ot bye and bye, it'll make the bark split on the big logs, 'n yer'll git all the better burn f'r it."

How anxiously I waited! At eight o'clock out sprang the sun in full strength. Nine—ten—then eleven o'clock came, and the day was one of the hottest I have ever felt up here. Half-past eleven!

"Now, me little frogs' ears," said Barker. "A few buckets of water ready at the hut; then away she goes a million!"

We got the water, then went up to the scrub, running along the edge of the falling and lighting up all round as we went, as quick as possible. Then back to the hut, fired all the grass round the burnt patch, and stopped there to watch the building. Before long we wished we hadn't

stopped, but by that time we daren't try to cross the burning grass, roaring away in the daytime. It wasn't too bad the first half-hour. There was just the thin blue reek from the crackling grass, and in the background the thicker smoke, rapidly increasing, from the scrub. Every now and again a darting tongue of dark crimson flame, with a fresh volume of oily black smoke, told that the line of fire was quickly joining up round the clearing. A little while longer, then, as the air inside the sixty-acre patch got heated and rarified, a strong breeze rose, setting into the fire from all sides, and going upward in the heated area, as through a funnel. At once a steady muffled roar was audible, and some trees left standing in the falling had quite big branches torn off and whirled aloft.

The falling was now fired all over by flying sparks, and the fire speedily assumed the appearance of a huge waterspout of thick oily black smoke sky-high, shot with innumerable flickering tongues of crimson flame. It roared like a titanic engine under tremendous steam pressure. As the smoke bellied out overhead and slowly overspread the sky, the sunlight faded, and gave place to a dim yellow twilight, which had an inexpressibly depressing effect on the spirits—a sort of “something going to happen” feeling. The strong draught whirled and eddied the smoke clouds round, nearly suffocating us in the hut, but, with streaming eyes and mouths covered by cloths, we kept a sharp look-out, extinguishing any sparks that alighted on or near the house. At one time it struck awe to our hearts to see a billowing

cloud of flame, like a crimson cloth being shaken out, some sixty feet right overhead.

In the midst of it all there came a wild yell from Braun's, "Hay! Hay!! Hay!!! You in that 'ut there. I see yer. Wer's me bullicks?" and there was Pardy dancing excitedly about on the creek bank. "Oh, lemme get atchyer. You wait, you Senex, yer —— cow I'll burst yer fer firin'!"

"Yer bullocks" (cough, cough) "are all right. They're" (cough) "penned up in Ellison's" (cough) "track. Can't get out," I wheezed, eyes nose and lungs full of smoke. "Fire caught by acci" (cough) "dent."

"Accident!! Acci-oh, Gord! If I cud —— Blanky good job fer you me bullicks is safe, but t'wont keep me 'ands off o' yer fer burnin' me grass. Accident!!! Yer COW! I'll —— you ——," and just here the grass suddenly caught at his feet and went roaring past him. He took to his heels up the paddock, and we saw him no more. A minute or two later and the fire leaped on to the old barn, and the poor old place, my first home in the bush, disappeared in a whirling gust of flame.

About 4 p.m. we managed to dodge away, our heads feeling like pumpkins, the worst of the fire being over, and by six o'clock it had died down, leaving a charred black waste, with innumerable twinkling lights all over it, which, in the gathering dusk, gave the impression of a city seen in the distance by night. For weeks after our eyes were blurred, and match or lamp flame was surrounded by a broad blue halo. Barker's eyes, al-

ways weak, were bleeding profusely long before we left the hut. The sole remains of Braun's old barn were one charred post and a few little heaps of nails, and his paddock was as clean and bare as a billiard table. A week later, covered with the new green shoot, it looked lovely, and has never had a weed in it since.

I kept carefully out of Pardy's way for a week or so, but he soon cooled down, for on the evening of the day after I fired the rain came suddenly, like a tank emptied on the roof, as it does in the tropics, and kept up continuously for thirty-six hours. In a week there was "feed for dogs" all over the district, but it was a near go for my burn. I set to work sowing my paddock carefully and well, finished the job by mid-January, and by the end of the month the grass was shooting well, giving every promise of the last being every bit as good a paddock as my first burn. My luck was "in" then.

CHAPTER XIX.

WARDSMAN AND DECKHAND.

AT the beginning of February I took up my duties as wardsman at the hospital. The young lady, who had been patiently waiting some ten years or so for me in Melbourne, had written to say that she thought we would be better struggling along together, and she was willing to rough it with me, even if she had to live in a tent. So I told her to have all ready for New Year, 1915, and in the meantime I would devote the whole of 1914 to making a cheque.

With this end in view I would do the light graft at the hospital until the end of May, then, conquering the feeling of dislike, go down to the Richmond again, and try for a job as deckhand aboard one of the tugboats hauling punts of cane up and down the river—technical work, not too hard and well paid. So I communicated with the manager at the mill, explaining that I was a fully qualified sailorman, and received a reply that if I would guarantee to stop the full season he would guarantee me a berth. So that was all right.

I soon fell in with the hospital routine, though continued close companionship with sickness, and sometimes death, had a depressing effect on my sensitive, rather highly-strung nerves.

We always had a Chinaman or two, and it made my gorge rise to see the pretty white nurses attending to some of the specimens, though the washing of 'em fell to me (ugh!). I remember one dreadful old morphia fiend, about seventy, who was brought in dying, and who passed out next day. I was detailed to watch him die, and perform the necessary offices immediately after death, but being called away for a few minutes, I missed his actual passing. When I returned he was lying there, his glassy eyes, shrivelled monkey face and dropped jaws, exposing the long yellow decayed fangs, making a perfectly dreadful sight; and even in that minute or two the horrible flies——. God! the mere sound of a blowfly has made me feel sick ever since then.

There was another old fellow named Ah Chi who also passed out, and in connection with whose death the matron made a peculiar "mistake in identity." His son had told her to ring up No. 16 when old Ah Chi passed in his checks. She rang up No. 60—a business house presided over by a gentleman named Archibald Davidson. I imagine his surprise, and presumably pleasure, on hearing through the telephone a sweet feminine voice, "Is that Archie?" One could imagine the said Archie tumbling over himself to do the polite, and wondering if he should address the fair unknown as "Yes, pet; you're the one."

The sweet voice continues: "Hospital. Matron speaking. Look here, Archie; your father died last night, and as the weather's so hot you'd better make arrangements for the funeral at once."

Quoth Archie: "What the devil are you talking about, madame?"

"W-why, isn't that Ah Chi, Chinatown?"

"Good Lord, no! This is Davidson, Messrs. Blank and Co." Collapse of matron.

I had to sit by the bedside of more than one alien watching them die; mostly at night, for the reason that, if they possibly can, they will get up and try to crawl away somewhere just before their passing. An unpleasant job, sitting waiting, like a ghoul or a vulture, and trying not to seem impatient.

None of us objected to attending the little Japs. though. They were always scrupulously clean, and, though nobody save a fool wants to see many of them knocking round here, yet they are real men one can respect, aye! and like—in their own country.

Every week saw fresh scrub-falling accident cases brought in. One in particular ought to be recorded, as showing that peace hath her heroes as well as war. An old chap, aged about sixty, scrub-falling by himself, had a tree jump back at him, jamming his foot and grinding it to pulp. He tied a bit of string round below the shin, cut off the bits of foot still dangling, and then crawled two miles through the scrub to a road. The cream cart passed shortly, outward bound.

"What's up, Bill?"

"Oh, had a bit of an accident" (he had his coat over the leg). "Pick me up when you come back. Y'll only be about twenty minutes or so, eh? Oh, well, I can last double that," and he lit his pipe.

Old Buckboard whipped his nags to a canter, and got back in less than the quarter-hour. Then he saw the injury.

"Christ!" he said; "if I'd seen that, their bloomin' cream cud a' gone t'ell."

"Yes, I know," said old Bill. "That's why I didn't show it yer."

After it was fixed up at the hospital, the doctor was sympathising with him.

"'S all right, Doc," he broke in; "I'll be savin' footgear now."

The weeks passed on, and I, being personally associated with the rest of the staff, saw things that the casual patient never heeds. For instance, the gentle, patient nurses, never out of temper, always calm, cool and prompt. No complaints, despite the comparatively meagre pay and long hours; the querulous complaints of sick men, made irritable by long hours of pain, passing over them like water off a duck's back, or to be met with a cheerful smile, and a "Well, now, cheer up; it's not that bad, I'm sure." Only when off duty and "done up" does the mask drop a little. And mighty little real gratitude they get from the average patient, or thanks either, beyond a few conventional phrases.

Just before I left the hospital there came tragedy to my selection. Old Paddy and a mate were falling my road, the council having decided to fall all roads adjacent to cleared selections, and the son of a neighbouring selector, a lad some twelve years old, used to bring their tucker out to them. On this occasion the lad had stopped

to watch them let a big drive go, although they had told him to trot along. Paddy's mate was at work on the driver, while he himself was brushing round their next drive.

A call: "Look out, Paddy; she's crackin'."

Paddy trotted along to the boy, who was astride a slow old mare that wouldn't get a move on. "Come on, kid. Git a bit further off. Told yer t' git outer this before."

A wild yell: "She's comin' back! Run, man, run!! Oh, Gord! the boy!"

The lad dug his heels into the mare's ribs, but she only shook her head, and started a slow walk. Paddy made a jump for him, caught him round the waist, and tried to drag him out of the saddle. Too late. Next second the tree caught the boy across the shoulders, drove him into the horse, and both into the earth, Paddy being thrown to one side with but a few bruises and scratches. Imagine the feelings of the poor mother! Outwardly though she took it like a Spartan; but it was no surprise that when her baby was born, five months later, she went West without an effort to hold on to life, heart-broken. May her soul find rest! Make no mistake; the slain trees can, and do, often get their revenge.

I left the hospital towards the end of May, all square, and with enough over to get to the Richmond, where I had to show up by 25th June. I saw the Lands Commissioner to obtain permission to leave my selection for a short while.

"That's all right," he said. "So long as it's bona fide wage-earning, and we know where you

are, we don't penalise a selector with a good record. Drop me a post card once a month, and you can stop away till the end of the year." I thanked him and promised.

Next day I was on the "briny" en route for Brisbane; had rather a stormy passage down. I paid a duty call to the Lands Office, and informed them I was highly satisfied, and into the willing ears of several reporters poured a glowing account of the district, which duly appeared in next day's papers.

I went by train to Lismore, and on to Broadwater by boat, and I enjoyed the interesting boat trips up the Tweed and down the Richmond. I got to Broadwater about 6 p.m. on a dismal day pouring with rain, to find a strike on and the mill hung up. I won't say anything about the strike, but, well—a pound a week and tucker isn't much, now is it? I had cut things rather fine—in fact I had only about five shillings left; so I interviewed the manager, who gave me permission to camp in the barracks along with a couple of decent blokes who came regularly from Sydney each year, and who, being like myself under an award, didn't join the strike camp.

They remembered me. "Hello, Senex, you here again?"

"Yes; and damn near broke, too."

"Cripes! You're not the only pebble on the beach. We are, too."

"Well, what are you going to do about tucker?" said I.

"Reckon the best thing we can do is to have

what you sailor blokes call a tarpaulin muster," said Jim. "What you got, Bill?"

Bill turned out his pockets. "Oh! seven and a sprat."

Jim had eight bob, and I five and six. By combining our resources and buying cheap stuff "in bulk" we lived eight days on that lot, till the strike finished and work started. Jim had built a fish trap, which was mainly responsible for our success, the river teeming with fish of all sorts. I was duly appointed deckhand on one of the tugs, powerfully engined but slightly ancient. The bloke in charge was rather a martyr to liver complaint, but he was ordinarily so decent that one could easily be tactful, and pass over the livery bouts. The engineer was German, but when the war started he became "Hanoverian"—as indeed I believe he was, only he didn't say so before. Not at all a bad sort, but apt to lose his head when things went wrong.

We'd be toddling along with a string of empty punts astern, when the regulation "doodlum-clink" would suddenly change to a series of terrific bangs. A wail of despair from below. "It's der whackum (vacuum) agin!" Then would we tie up to the handiest wharf and effect repairs, with much banging of hammers and clashing of tools thrown angrily about. Next day, perhaps, we would haul a punt off a shallow place, stirring up much mud. A few minutes later a powerful smell of burning rubber, and loud oaths in a strong German accent, would apprise us of another disaster. Up would come the "sheaf,"

tearing his hair and dancing on his cap. "What's wrong, Franz?" says our skipper, with that quietly sarcastic attitude which is more maddening than a blow.

"Blitzen und picklehaubes! Der Cotdom gondener iss choged vit zand!!"

"Well, clear the damn thing then. What'r'ye makin' such a fuss for?"

"But der rupper backing iss burnt!" with much gesticulation.

"Well," says the skipper, with a disgusted look. "Want me to give you one o' m' boots to mend it with? Put a new bit of rubber in!"

Franz, not apparently having thought of it before, dives below again, and we wait until the orgy of oaths, bangs, thumps and thumb-smashings has ceased, and he comes up again, wiping his brow, to inform us that "she's all right now till someting eless goes."

But it was always the "whackum," and it "went" pretty often, in fact nearly every day for a month, and Franz talked wildly of "shucking his yob." This statement roused old Tom (the skipper) to ribald contumely. "What! You 'shuck' your 'yob.' Why! a bloomin' charge of dynamite wouldn't shift you, and you know it, and" (with bitter emphasis) "you can't stuff me with that, old 'shap.'"

At last one day Franz's *bête noir* broke so badly that we were left alongside a downstream wharf for ten hours while he took the whole caboodle up to the mill in a launch, to be properly seen to. After that it went all right. Time passed

quickly, the work was interesting, even the deckhand's job calling for the exercise of some brains and common-sense, and I averaged about £12 a month right through.

It was a bitter satire on deep sea life. When I was mate of an 8000-ton steamer I got £10 and find my own uniform, instruments, etc., and had a position to live up to. Here, deckhand on a little tub we could have carried on our poop, I was actually banking more than my pay as mate, no position to keep up, and, having no responsibility, sleeping well at night!

We sometimes came up late, and the river on a fine night is really beautiful. We brought up the last load of the season on 22nd January, 1915, and the same night I took passage in the "Brundah" for Sydney, with about £60 in my pocket. She was due at Broadwater at 10 p.m., and I went up to old Tom's place to bid him good-bye.

At nine o'clock we heard a siren. "Hello, she's before her time. Hurry up, Charlie." She had just cast off when I reached the wharf, so I chartered a trap and drove hell for leather through a pelting rain storm to Wardell. I tumbled into the ferry skiff, tipped the boatman to put me alongside the "Brundah," scrambled frantically aboard, to find—she was going to tie-up till daylight. In due course we left the river, arrived in Sydney after a rather stormy passage, and thus ended the second stage of my journey.

CHAPTER XX.

MARRIED.

I GOT the wedding ring in Sydney. I was always rather a bashful person, and I went from shop to shop without entering, because there were girls behind the counter. At last I came to one. Ah! a man here. This'll do me. And in I dived.

"Yes, sir; and what can I get for you?"

"Er—er—I want some wedding rings, please" (as if I were a Mormon).

"Certainly. Miss Blithers, attend to this gentleman, please."

Forward stepped a perky miss from the back of the store. It was early in the morning, and I was the only customer. Whether purposely or not I don't know, but she took me to the end counter, where a couple more girls were lying in wait for me, put down about a dozen trays of rings in front of me, and smiled. I blushinglly pulled out by marked size-card, and they smiled some more. Finally I chose one and a keeper; then—

"May I congratulate you?" smilingly.

"Oh, er—yes—er—thank you."

"Sydney?"

"Er—no; Melbourne."

"Indeed." Then very archly: "Now I'm sure she's dark." (I am gingery myself.)

Before I knew where I was I had hauled out her picture from my breast pocket and handed it over.

Instantly: "M-m-m-m! Cream Sicilian. . . . M-m! Jap..silk. . . . M-m! Ducky shoes . . . love of a hat . . .," and so forth. Finally the photograph was handed back.

"Yes; she does look a real good sort. We hope you'll be very happy."

My opinion of them at once rose ten beans. I bade them good-bye and left the shop, followed by their cheerful grins.

That night I boarded the boat for Melbourne, speculating most of the passage as to whether She would be down to meet me, how She would look, and so on. It was nearly five years since we had bade good-bye to each other—for a few months! The familiar landmarks slipped by—Montague Island, Cook's Pigeon House, Mt. Im-lay, Queenscliff, then Melbourne wharf at 11 p.m.

And She was there to meet me all right—with a chaperone (I suppose that's the correct term. Anyway, it was her aunt), who discreetly turned her back to our meeting, and, giddy old thing, ogled a big policeman, who was looking at us with a kind of amused tolerance as of one who had been all through that kind of thing long ago and got past it. We chartered a cab, and got the last train home by a hair's breadth.

The day was fixed for a fortnight ahead, and the time passed in a whirlwind of visits and

introductions to about half the population of that Melbourne suburb, I should think. Then there was the preliminary visit to the reverend gentleman who was to "pass the reef point."

I'll never forget that day. We had missed the train, and had to walk, say, three miles over some flat open country. I've been in Calcutta in the height of the South-West monsoon; in a place called *Infernillo* (anglicé "little Hell"), a dreadful desert spot up the Gulf of California; in *Santiago-da-Cuba* in July—but never in my life have I felt such an unbearable scorching heat as on that awful walk in the hot North wind in Melbourne. The kindly old clergyman showed us his thermometer—109 degrees in a stone-walled room and the blinds drawn. And they call it a hell of a day up here in North Queensland when the mercury touches 85 degrees! Give a dog a bad name——

The momentous day came round in due course. The augury was excellent. A brilliant sun, cool breeze, and, as I stepped on to the verandah in the early morning, a flight of white seagulls wheeling round overhead. What better omen could the most superstitious desire?

The ceremony was quickly over. I am burdened with four Christian names, and when the parson came to "I, Charles William Reginald," etc., he transposed the names, and there was a dreadful moment, while I hesitated, wondering whether I would be properly married if I alluded to myself as "William Charles." However, I courageously said I was Charles, the minister smiled, and we

were soon spliced hard and fast. My best man had the ring ready at the right moment, and of course the blessed thing wouldn't go on, and I had to use brute force to get it on to its proper finger. Then the wedding breakfast, where doubtless, under the combined influence of love, lemonade and excitement, I made numerous speeches, and soared to heights of windy verbosity seldom heard outside Parliament House. Following that the usual photographer arranged us on the lawn and snapped us in the usual fashion; then, ho! for the station and Australian wharf, where lay the good ship "Canberra," which was to have the signal honour of bearing us North.

CHAPTER XXI.

STARTING HOUSEKEEPING.

RAPIDLY the splendid "Canberra" ploughed her way North. Fine weather attended us, making our trip a perfect honeymoon. The wretched confetti having completely given us away, the ship's personnel seemed to regard us with a sort of proprietary air of paternal amusement. In due course we reached Mackay, where there was a loup of a sea alongside, sufficient to keep the tenders rolling and bumping, and prevented the side ladder from being lowered. The passengers desirous of going ashore had therefore to be gathered into the embrace of a cargo net six at a time and slung overboard on to the tender's deck per der-rick, like so many bags of spuds. It was the funniest spectacle imaginable (to the onlooker) to see the sling load go down by the run on to the tender's deck, the contents to go sprawling like a spilt handful of peas. Of course it can't be helped, with the tender rising and falling four or five feet in the seaway.

In Townsville we had rather a nasty experience. Went for a motor boat picnic with a large party across the bay. Coming back late at night—dark, rainy and blowing fresh, with high fol-

lowing sea—one of the party went overboard. It was some time before he was missed, then we 'bout ship and headed into it, continuing until we had "all hands and the cook" bailing. Another illustration of the needle and haystack business, so we gave up, and finally got inside the Breakwater about 2 a.m. About half-way to the town wharf the engine gave a protesting cough, slowed and stopped. No petrol left aboard. So it was a fairly "close go."

We transhipped at Townsville into a dirty old tub belonging to another company and left about noon for Cairns. That night we slipped forrard on to the focsle head, and stood leaning on the stem head, watching her sharp cutwater shearing along and admiring the play of phosphorescence in the backwash. A perfect night. The dim coast slipping past, the dull beat of the engines, the plunging hiss of the stem ploughing the watery furrow, and that strange tropical smell, coming on the faint land breeze, gave an air of romance to this part of our trip, and we were loath to go below and lose any of it.

We were roused out in the morning in time to see the twinkling lights of Cairns just paling to the first faint streaks of dawn. Then the landing, a hurried rush to the station, and by the time we had settled down we were half-way to the Range. The weather was beautifully fine, and the country round Atherton looked its best, giving a splendid first impression to a "newey." There happened to be a buckboard waiting at our station, which took us right out to Ellison's

place, where Mrs. Ellison, who had been expecting us, gave us a hospitable welcome.

I found many changes round the place. A road, sixty feet wide, had been cut through the scrub right out to my selection, though a lot of side-cutting and bridge construction would still be necessary to make it navigable for a buckboard. Len, Terry, old Paddy and some others had enlisted for the war, and I frankly admit I felt a bit ashamed and sort of lonely when I heard of it. The wife and I had waited nearly twelve years for our taste of happiness, and if the authorities wanted me they knew where I was. Poor old Paddy had celebrated his departure by a glorious burst, and his final farewell to the crowd on the station was, "'Sall ri-ight, you shaps, b-but (hic!) y'all have er go whe-nen subscrihun (hic!) gess goin-nin."

There was a young fellow who had gone named Jimmy McKay. He had the place adjoining mine opposite end to Terry O'Gorman, and we decided to camp at his little iron shack till I got a bit better place erected on my own farm. So, a day or two after arrival, the wife and I carried our belongings over to Jim's little shack, along the muddy scrub tracks. It was the wife's first introduction to scrub life. Every few yards we had to stop while she picked the blood-thirsty little scrub leeches off herself, and she spent that night crying quietly, scratching scrub-itch and leech bites, and nursing the place on her arm where the cursed stinging tree had got her through the coat sleeve. Poor girl! She was dreadfully home-

sick, and the open fire and camp oven cookery had lowered her spirits some more. She stuck to it like a Briton though, and never said anything. Jim's humpy was a very depressing place, too, situate at the bottom of a hollow in the scrub. Only ten acres of a clearing, and the dense wall of standing timber glooming down on the house in a pessimistic fashion.

She soon shook down to it, however, and in a few days I started with a mate named Jack Redburn, who kindly volunteered to give me a hand, splitting out the stuff for a new house. Thus we started housekeeping together. Quite penniless, no income assured, and the future extremely uncertain. Rather funny to look back on, but grim enough at the time.

CHAPTER XXII.

STRUGGLING ALONG.

I USED to set out at six every morning to go over to my place, where my mate, Jack Redburn, would be awaiting me, and we worked until dark putting up the house. He was a good bushman, and in ten days or so we had a really decent comfortable little house up. Eighteen by twelve it was, with a ten-by-ten kitchen attached, all rough lined and ceiled. It was a lonely time for the wife, and I often felt my way home in the dark to find her crouched alongside the smoky fire, starting at every sound from the scrub.

She and I carried our stuff over to the new place, having to make a long detour through the scrub to avoid scrambling about in Jimmy's overgrown loggy clearing, but the end of March saw us comfortably installed. Mrs. Ellison made us a present of a wee dolly stove she had used at first, so there were no more scorched aprons and smarting eyes for the wife, and the only fly in the ointment was how to make a bob or two. Though so early in the year, people were anticipating a dry spell, as the Rainy Season had not, so far, been up to much, as the grass wasn't as plentiful as it should have been. On that account



We had a really decent comfortable little house.

there wasn't much doing. My first move, after talking things over with older settlers, was to get some cows.

Two "purple patches" of advice:—

DAD VINCENT: "Lord *love* yer, man! Of *course* you've done the *right thing*! Look at *me*. Came up here with *no experience*, a *wife* and thirteen *kids*. I've been *submerged* half a dozen *times*, and *look* at me now. Get some *cows* and good *luck* to you."

OLD PARDY: "So yeh've got married? Well, a man's a blanky lizard ef 'e can't knock out a blanky livin' in the bush. Git some blanky cows; and dairy!"

So I put the fear of a drought away from me. Such a thing had never happened before in the thirty years' history of the Tableland. Cows were fairly cheap. Therefore—borrow some more cash from the Agricultural Bank and buy cows. Good. I applied for £200 and got it without any trouble.

Then Bayton the bullocky offered to take some pine off my place at sixpence a hundred (two pounds odd in Sydney!) and give me the cutting. I jumped at it, and he took about twelve thousand feet. This gave me enough money to get six coils of barb wire (it hadn't risen much up to then), and about £3 over to renew my credit with the storekeeper. That was the last money he got for twelve months; yet he never worried me. I was only one of scores on his books that year, but he always got more kicks that thanks, and of course was a profiteer.

I used the wire to fence my road line; then

made a deal for sixteen cows, a bull and seven twelve-month heifers for my £200, and thought I was all sagalio. Four cows were milking, and the others were supposed to be in calf, but weren't. We made a bit of butter and sold it to some bachelor neighbours for about two months, and that paid the rent. Then the green grass disappeared, the cows went dry, and the two calves that had come with them died.

I assisted the maintenance man putting up a bridge near my place, and that paid for rates. A week or two cutting timber nearby for Hood and Bayton, and the half-yearly interest bill worried us no more; then their bullocks got too weak to work, so that source of income stopped too. And "Old Store's" account rendered kept on mounting up, although we lived on rice and beef-shins, made a seventy-pound bag of sugar last six months, and a fifty-pound bag of flour eight weeks. A nightmare of a time!

So July came along, with some hard frosts. Now frost up here is invariably followed by rain within two days in a normal year, which causes the grass to get a spring on at once, as the days are always warm and bright. But in this infernal year there was no rain, so the grass got completely settled—above ground, that is. It sprang again in a night once the rain came at the end of the year. My cows were wandering out through Braun's paddock all over the country searching for a bit of green stuff, and I nearly tramped my legs off looking for them to keep them dipped and clear of ticks. Half the time I couldn't find them,

so that with ticks and starvation the herd got down to ten.

August. Still no rain! Got a job brushing for old Pardy, and had to walk four miles each way to work and back every day, so averaged about 30/- a week, which had to be hoarded over against bank interest at the end of the year. And the storekeeper's bill still rose!

October. Will it *ever* rain again? Dismal tales from everyone of dying stock, bankruptcy and ruin. My remaining cows could hardly stagger, and their ribs stood out like the black notes on a piano. I managed to get them home, when they were too weak to play up, let them into my banana patch, and the twenty clumps kept them going for a week or two. They even pawed out and ate the roots. My bull got into a very rough paddock not far away, fell down a steep stony creek, broke a leg and died there. The outlook was as hopeless as financial stability under Free-trade.

November came, and old Omar's "blue sullen vault of sky" glared remorselessly down on us for over a fortnight of the month. No rain—not even the distant muttering promise of coming thunder. Then, on the 20th November, about 2 p.m., there was a sudden long roll of thunder in the distance. Two cows had calved, and I had the poor, miserable, staggering wretches in the bails, trying to force down their necks a bit of watercress I had found in the creek over a mile away.

I whipped out of the shed.

Thank God! There, rapidly rising over the trees to the South-East, was a long bank of black

cloud. The thunder grew louder, and a cold refreshing wind suddenly sprang into being. We could see and smell the grey drifting curtain of rain that spelt Resurrection! A faint pattering on the roof. Louder; louder yet! until it became a deafening roar that kept up for over an hour. Salvation! The drought had broken at last. I went out and bathed in the rain, absorbing it in every pore. I think it's the only time in my life I was delighted to be wet through. It was just in time to save my remaining cows.

I had left but seven cows, and six twenty-month heifers—say, £118 worth; but the debt of £200 to the bank still remained, and the store-keeper's £40 had to be remembered, and the—oh, but why recall such misery?

Apropos the drought. It wasn't really a drought at all. I remember once going from Sydney to Melbourne by train, and after Albury the whole country was literally bare as a board. Well, up here, at the worst time, there was knee-high dry grass somewhere in every paddock; but the fool cows, never having been used to anything but green feed, simply starved sooner than look at it. A few that did take to it here and there kept in fair nick throughout, but of course didn't give any milk. I'll bet there isn't a Victorian cocky who would have thought it anything worse than just a bit of a dry spell. And, too, out of the hundreds of creeks running through the scrublands, I only saw one that had gone dry. I shall never forget the delicious smell of the wet earth after the first rainstorm, and that night,

all over the paddocks, there was a pæan of praise from countless millions of frogs. Now, where the dickens do these blokes get to during a dry spell? We hadn't heard a croak for at least six months (or when the cows croaked they didn't do it audibly).

Next morning there was a faint green sheen all over the place, and in a week the grass was six inches high. The cows bogged in, their ribs disappeared, and four more calved. Thus about the middle of December I was a bloated capitalist, owning land and stock, with six cows milking and one more to come in, and reckoned it was high time to lend my support to the local butter factory and commence sending in cream.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JOYFUL EXPERIENCES OF COW-COCKYING.

So I went in to interview the factory people. I had to go to the expense of a new pair of boots for the occasion. I hadn't been wearing boots for months, but could hardly go in in bare feet. I had to take shares in the factory, and buy a separator—on terms; and right here is where I found for the first time a use for the chest full of blocks I had brought up to haul the scrub down with. I sold the lot to old Pardy for a fiver and paid for my boots, deposit on shares and separator, and exes. in town out of it. In due course the separator was brought out, in pieces on a pack horse the last mile or so, and erected in the split slab dairy.

What an event the first separating was! What though I forgot to clean the vaseline out of certain little holes and corners, and the cream wouldn't pass through; that, in my anxiety to avoid turning too slow, I went at eighty revolutions instead of sixty, and the final result hardly covered the bottom of a gallon billy. We owned property! stock!! machinery!!! and we washed up the glistening new parts afterwards with pride

and joy, which soon faded, by the way. And it rained, and kept on raining—probably to make up for the drought. The moisture poured in chilly streams through the rusty old iron roof of the bails, and sometimes I got nearly as much rainwater as milk. The roads speedily became bogs, and the creeks rose, and kept high for weeks. I was wet through morning, noon and night, and everything in the house got damp and mildewed. Boots looked, and smelt, like old bronze. Of course, we wouldn't have been so miserable had we possessed a good big house, good bails, yards, fences, and so forth; but these luxuries needed cash—which I hadn't got, so I had to put up with makeshifts.

Braun was away somewhere and wouldn't fence his creek boundary. I couldn't. So behold! when I stepped out in the dismal, grey, misty dawn two cows would be in Braun's, one at Domino's Hill, two miles off one way, one in O'Gorman's, and the others playing hide-and-seek over about five hundred acres of overgrown, loggy paddock. The result was that I was often only starting to milk at 10.30 a.m. In the afternoon it was much the same. You would follow them up to see where they planted. Go back to the place at 4 p.m. No sign of them. After an hour's search you might come across them at the end of O'Brien's or Braun's or O'Gorman's or somewhere—but never the lot of them together. Finally I got hold of some plain wire and ran four wires along Braun's. Then other people's stray steers came along, walked through it wherever they pleased, as steers

will, and kept me all my spare time patching up that makeshift. But it kept the cows home, anyway.

Then carrying the cream. I had to take it down to a place opposite Liston's, three miles away. Had neither horse nor money to buy one. Tried to carry a can down by myself once, but never again. Ever try to carry thirty pounds or so of liquid in a sixteen-pound can, all smooth and polished tinned steel? Try it and see how she goes. The weight keeps shifting, and one staggers round all over the shop, and staggering on a muddy road nearly knee deep, things happen. You soon find yourself plastered thick from head to foot. The wife volunteered to help, so we slung the cursed can on a stick and carried it on our shoulders that way. Tramp, tramp through the bog, puffing and panting in the steamy heat across two deep creeks and along slippery "sidlings," struggling down to Roden's, where we left the cans to be picked up by the carter sixteen hours later and taken into the train, which eventually took it to the factory, where the cream was almost invariably graded second-class.

One day sticks in my memory. It had been intensely hot, and we got to Roden's late. There we heard a tale of woe. Mr. Roden was in hospital, and there was only Mrs. Roden and a kid to milk thirty cows. Of course I, like an ass, offered to help, forgetful that I had my own to see to, and by the time I thought of my own affairs it was getting dusk and the delayed thunderstorm threatened. We hurried off, I with two

empty cream cans slung, Chinaman fashion, on a stick across the shoulders, the wife with a billy containing a jewfish still alive, which Mrs. Roden had given her—a special luxury we hadn't tasted for a year. We had just got into the thick scrub when the storm burst on us. It speedily became pitch dark, and there we were, two miles from home, the rain pouring in buckets full, drenched and shivering, slowly picking our way among the innumerable roots and stumps by the lightning flashes' flickering glare, I in front, the wife behind hanging on to my belt. Every now and then I would feel a jerk, and a flop and smothered groan apprised me that the wife had fallen down again. Then a wail, "W-where's me fish?" and we would both be down on our knees in the mud feeling round for that precious fish until a lightning flash showed us where it was. Finally I slung the cans to one side and half-led, half-carried the poor girl home.

When we arrived at the brow of a short steep pinch leading down to our creek, we realised the impossibility of walking—just sat down in the mud and tobogganed down it. We reached home, covered with mud, drenched and exhausted, at 8 p.m. The cows weren't milked that night.

This was about the end of March. In the following October our first child was born. Of course we didn't know. Still, what might have happened! Well, just about this time I heard Hood had a horse for sale, so I went and saw him. He was an old steeplechaser, twenty years

old, and very thin and ribby. He stood about six feet high at the shoulder.

I asked Hood what he had on him. "Thirty bob," said Hood.

"Done," said I, and dragged the moke home.

We called him Napoleon Bonaparte, and stood looking at him that evening, telling each other he wasn't too bad at all. The old, old saggy-kneed animal would look "noble" when he picked up a bit; he showed quality, didn't he now? in spite of his age—and so forth, until, our eyes meeting, we burst out laughing, with a simultaneous exclamation, "'On Our Selection' to the life,"

We found the old chap would eat anything, being used to kids petting him; so we filled him up with odds and ends of porridge, cabbage stalks. bread, spud peelings, and so on, and, strange to say, he did pick up. He was a whale on separated milk, and got plenty of it. Anyway, the poor old fellow carried the cream (attached to his back by a weird contrivance of cornbags and rope) for two years, so he paid for himself. Then he got sick and developed a booming cough—a very curfew, tolling the knell of Bona-parting.

I called in a bloke to look at him.

"Oh," says he: "it's on'y gripes. Give 'im a good 'earty kick in the guts. That'll settle 'im."

I didn't try the recipe, and poor old Boney settled himself that night—in the cowyard; and I had to cut him up and drag him away in sections for cremation.

What sickening shocks we did have that year, to be sure! Our first cheque was sixteen shil-

ings for the month, after share-money and separator instalment were deducted. Then the long-suffering storekeeper stopped credit, and for a while we lived on what we could grow, with scrub turkey, and once or twice bandicoot. The latter weren't bad, in fact, very palatable; but they looked ratty. The Government remitted the year's rent, but bank interest and rates had to be met; and my biggest cheque for the year was £8. Oh, it was a daisy time! However, my cows had all had heifer calves; I brought them safely past weaning point, and got £4 a head for them on the top of a risen market that the week after was fallen to £2. This was one of the rare strokes of luck I have had, and paid two-thirds of Old Store's account, renewing credit.

In October a daughter was born to us, who, thanks to the dreadful climate (whites can't live up here, you know) hasn't had a day's sickness yet! In December my young heifers calved, and the cheques each month from the factory increased, so that I got clear of debt, and actually felt what having a few pounds in the bank was like. I managed to keep the 1917 crop of calves. It was a good year.

In 1918 things went swimmingly again, but a plague of caterpillars ate me out, and I lost half the youngsters, but still I crept ahead a bit financially. In June my son and heir made his appearance. Another miserably, bright, bonny, rosy-cheeked victim of the climate. At the end of the year Hood had a look at my timber, and offered to cart logs to the mill, and haul the resulting sawn timber out again if I paid for cutting the

logs up; he to charge cartage as a cash deposit to me on my standing timber. I jumped at the chance, for, lo! here was a new house for us. I could just manage to scrape enough cash together to pay for cutting at the mill. In February, 1919, I got the house up, paying for its erection with two young heifers.

Now we had indeed turned the corner, and could begin to believe that our struggling days were really behind us. A month or two later Hood, who had shifted out close to us, made a proposal to join forces: I to look after the cows, of which he had a decent herd; he to work his bullocks; all proceeds to be pooled and shared.

It has worked well, for he is a white man and a good mate. We have had a plague of caterpillars again, but got over it without serious loss, and it really looks as if we were at last firmly on our feet, with a prospect of a continued comfortable competence—thanks mainly to the unselfish self-denial and splendid management of that greatest of all blessings—a good wife. We aren't millionaires yet, but can't growl, and are infinitely better off than our town brethren, with all their picture palaces, handy shops and what not. Anyhow, the rosy cheeks of our two splendid kiddies would be enough to reconcile us to the, perhaps, somewhat lonely life. In spite of (perhaps because of) hard struggles and difficulties overcome anything but easily, neither of us feel inclined to quit even now that we could, and with the passing of time the little home we have carved out of the scrub for ourselves becomes more homely and dearer to our hearts.

CHAPTER XXIV.

L'ENVOI.

IN concluding an effort like the foregoing, it is, I believe, the usual thing for the author to tender a few words of good advice. A thankless job, perhaps, for a wise man doesn't want it and a fool won't take it. However, in case any reader might be contemplating scratching a living out of the scrub, I offer him the following, free, gratis and for nothing:—

1. Decide on your district; think carefully before taking a block; get it; then hang on to it till all's blue, for blocks aren't so easy to get now-a-days, and the time is gone when a bloke could say, "'Ere! I'm chuckin' this, and goin' for a block closer in."

2. Get your scrub down as quickly as possible. Standing timber won't bring in a penny in a lifetime, and mill timber's a rotten reed to lean on for an income. Fifty acres of grass, well fenced, will, at agistment, bring in tucker and a bit over after the first year, even if you don't use it yourself.

3. Never go working alone in the scrub. Always try to have a mate with you, and never wear smooth-soled boots in the scrub, unless you want to go to hospital.

4. Don't be afraid of the State Agricultural Bank. It's cheap money, and they won't (since they can't) foreclose for twenty-one years, provided interest is paid when due. The bank's assistance enables you to stop on your block instead of going away to work. Go as far as they'll allow you for scrub-falling and buying cows, but not for house-building or other unproductive work. Let Strawberry pay for that. Leave private banks alone.

5. Get grass seed in at once after the burn, and don't sow all one kind, no matter how good a feed it is. Her Majesty Queen Cow likes a change, like ourselves.

6. Don't start dairying until you have a good fence round the place. Then buy a few good cows and a *good* bull. Be wary buying milkers from a dairyman. Better get springing heifers.

7. Here get married. Weigh well the advantages of a widow with, say, a couple of children able to milk. If she has a little cash, all the better. Then it won't matter if she's not beautiful and is ten years your senior.

8. If your early milking arrangements are rough, it'll be all right if you keep everything scrupulously clean. Slap the whitewash round. It's cheap, and, like a parson's coat, occasionally covers a multitude of sins.

9. Don't sell your young heifers when weaned if you can struggle along without doing so. Breeding up your own herd, you know what you've got. Also your old originals won't live for ever.

10. Try and grow a bit of hand-feed for your cows as a stand-by, no matter how good a dairying district you're in.

11. Never lose your temper, no matter how rorty your cows may be. Cows are very sensitive, and respond to quiet treatment quicker than any other animal. If you go down to the bails in a temper, the cows know it, even if you're quiet with them. They get uneasy, and hang on to the milk. I learned this by experience.

12. Keep your heart up and battle along. Don't let set-backs break your spirit. The sticker gets there—like the postage stamp. But, make no mistake, you'll need a heart to tackle the scrub.

And that's the lot, blokes. Hello! milking time. I must get away after the cows. I wish you luck. Well—hooray!

“SENEX.”

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